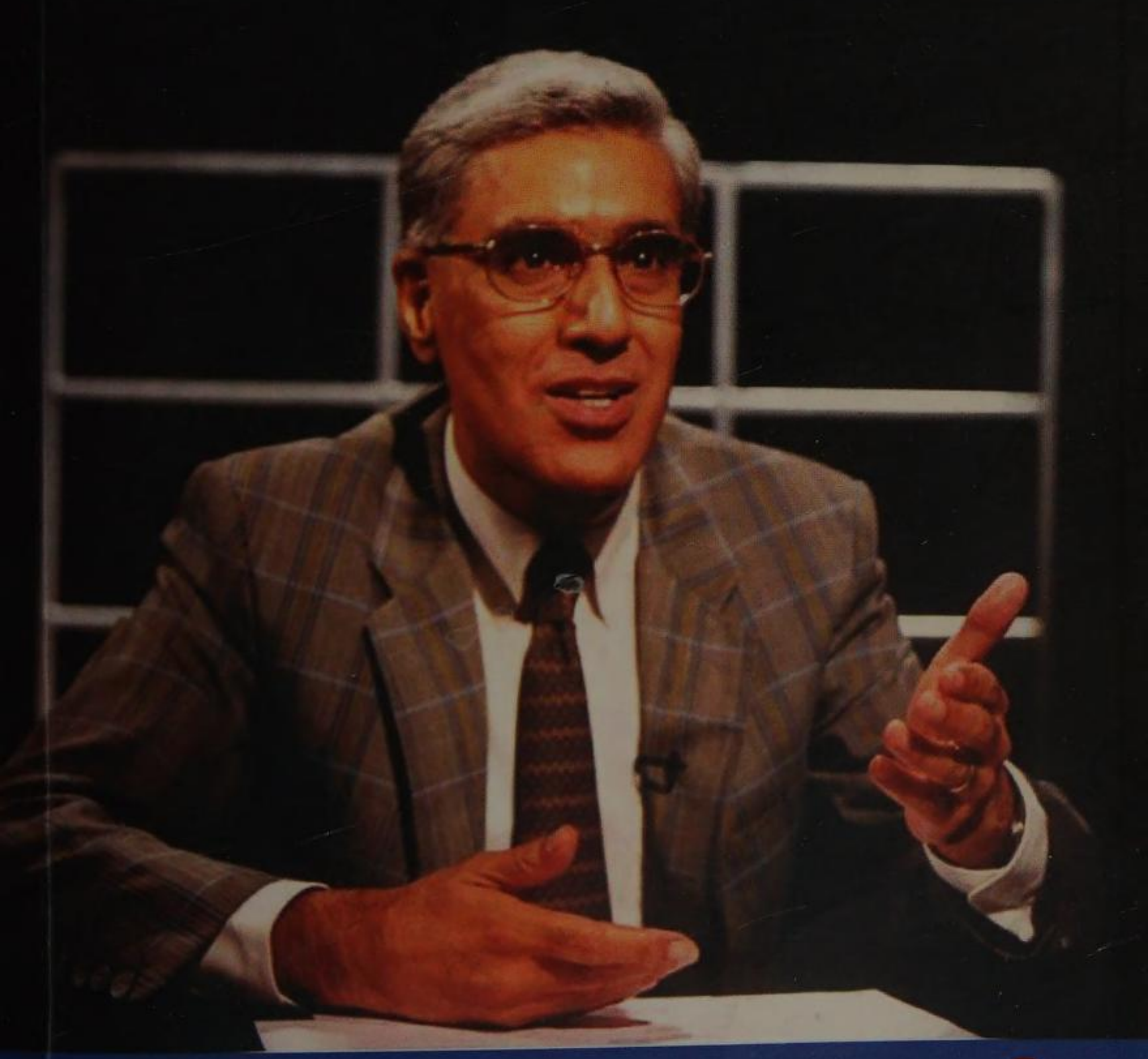
FACE TO FACE India

CONVERSATIONS WITH **KARAN THAPAR**



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Karan Thapar was born in 1955 in Srinagar. After receiving a doctorate in International Relations from St Anthony's College, Oxford, he began his career in journalism with *The Times*. In 1993 he moved to India and worked with a number of television production houses before setting up his own production house, Infotainment Television, in 2001. Karan Thapar is perhaps India's best known television commentator and interviewer. In 2003, he became the first person to win both awards (best programme and best presenter) in the current affairs category of the Asian Television Awards. The best presenter award was for *Face to Face India*, and he won the same award again in 2005 for *Hard Talk India*.

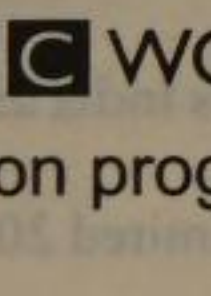
FACE TO FACE
India

Conversations with **Karan Thapar**

Based on the

BBC WORLD

television programme



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BBC Worldwide

PENGUIN BOOKS
Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110 017, India
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Group (NZ), cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Group (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published by Penguin Books India and BBC Worldwide Limited 2006

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ISBN 10: 0143 033441
ISBN 13: 9780143033448

Typeset in Sanskrit Palatino by S.R. Enterprises, New Delhi
Printed at Saurabh Printers Pvt. Ltd., NOIDA

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To Nisha, who always believed in me

Contents

A.R. Rahman 1

Aishwarya Rai 17

Amartya Sen 33

Amitav Ghosh 46

Arundhati Roy 60

Dev Anand 74

Kapil Dev 89

Karan Johar 102

Kumar Mangalam Birla 120

Maharani Gayatri Devi 136

R.K. Laxman 150

Raghu Rai 163

Ratan Tata 178

Pt. Ravi Shankar 192

Sachin Tendulkar 205

Sam Manekshaw 219

Shah Rukh Khan 234

Sonal Mansingh 251

Viswanathan Anand 267

Ustad Zakir Hussain 284

Publisher's Note

The twenty interviews that appear in this book were telecast on BBC World between 1999 and 2002 as part of the *Face to Face India* series. The data contained in the interviews has not been updated in light of subsequent developments. The interviews afford glimpses into the personalities of twenty celebrities framed by a particular moment in time.

Publisher's Note

A.R. Rahman

When he exploded on the music scene in 1992 A.R. Rahman took Indian popular music by storm. Whether it was film soundtracks like Roja *or* Bombay, Taal *or* Dil Se, *or albums like* Vande Mataram *or* Jana Gana Mana, *the effect was stunning. But one big question has always remained. What is Rahman like? What has his life been like? What makes him tick? These are questions that till now he hasn't seemed to answer. Well, let's see if he changes his mind today, as we meet Allah Rakha Rahman.*

Karan Thapar: Your life has been a big mystery, almost a secret. Is that because you've deliberately kept it that way, or is it because people have never asked you the right questions?

A.R.Rahman: I think it is the latter. People have not asked me the right questions.

Karan Thapar: So if I ask the right questions, I might be able to open the box and get the secrets?

A.R.Rahman: Perhaps, yes.

Karan Thapar: Okay, let's start at the beginning. You were born in 1967 in Mylapore, Chennai. What sort of a family were you born into?

A.R.Rahman: My father was a composer and also a music arranger, and my mother was an ordinary housewife. My father was a workaholic. I think I'm now

going through a phase similar to his life—a hectic schedule, working night and day.

Karan Thapar: So music was inherited through your genes?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Now, as you said, your father R.K. Shekhar was a musician. Was it film music that he was into?

A.R.Rahman: He was into plays first. And then he assisted a lot of music directors, arranged music for them. In those days music directors just had tunes with them and my father would arrange the music and do the background music. He was the only person who did this for Malayalam movies at the time. After that he did a movie on his own. Unfortunately he died the day the movie was released.

Karan Thapar: In fact you were six when he first fell ill and he was ill for two or three years. What had happened?

A.R.Rahman: It was very mysterious. They diagnosed it as something like cancer and then somebody said it was voodoo and it was very confusing. I don't remember much since I was very young at the time; but we went through a lot of difficult times when I was a child.

Karan Thapar: Your father's death when you were nine must have shattered you.

A.R.Rahman: I didn't quite get it at the time, because I was too young. I was almost eighteen when I first missed him. That's when I began to realize that I didn't have a father.

Karan Thapar: It was about the time that you lost your father that your family converted to Islam, am I right?

A.R.Rahman: It was much later, actually. But there was a Sufi who was treating him towards his last days, till maybe a week or two before he died. We met him later, after probably seven or eight years, and that's when we found a spiritual anchor, which gave us peace.

Karan Thapar: So it was a process that began when your father died but you actually converted eight or nine years later?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: When you converted, you changed your name from Dilip Kumar to Allah Rakha Rahman. How did you choose your new name?

A.R.Rahman: My mother chose Allah Rakha. She saw it in her dream or something like that, and then Rahman was chosen by the members of my family.

Karan Thapar: Did it take long to get used to having a new name?

A.R.Rahman: Basically I was working almost every day of my childhood; it was to and fro between the studios and school. And after finishing high school I quit school and I started working from nine to nine and then ten in the night to five in the morning I would do jingles. I was almost intoxicated, just work, work, and more work.

Karan Thapar: So you were never really conscious of your name?

A.R.Rahman: No, I wasn't conscious of anything.

Karan Thapar: So when you changed your name form Dilip to Allah Rakha Rahman, the change didn't really matter? You just took it in your stride?

A.R.Rahman: I wanted to get out of my old mindset and start a new life. So this thing helped me a lot. I was a keyboard player and then I became a composer. This helped me a lot to become more daring, rebellious ...

Karan Thapar: So in a sense changing names, changing faces, were like closing one chapter and opening another chapter?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the situation you faced when your father died. You were nine. Your family was left in a bad way. How bad were things?

A.R.Rahman: You know that without money nothing moves in the world. He left some equipment and stuff. So I was almost like a roadie whom they call to set up equipment for other people to play. And then my mother suggested, 'Why don't you go full time into music and do it yourself?'

Karan Thapar: So did you have to leave school or did you have to do this at the same time as you studied?

A.R.Rahman: Both. I started doing it at the same time, which was so difficult because people at school didn't know anything about it and they would shout at me, 'What the hell are you doing? Without attendance how can you pass?'

Karan Thapar: So they complained that you weren't concentrating on your studies?

A.R.Rahman: They were doing their duty and it came to a point where I had to choose one of the two. And I chose music.

Karan Thapar: At what age did you then drop out of school and choose music?

A.R.Rahman: When I was in class eleven I think.

Karan Thapar: And from that point on music took over?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Now, in the early days—it was written in articles—that you worked with some of the leading Tamil music directors including Ilaiyaraja. Is that correct?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: When it says 'work', what does it mean?

A.R.Rahman: I started full-time studio sessions in '83 with Telugu music directors called Ramesh Naidu and Rajkoti. Then I entered the Tamil scene with Ilaiyaraja for one and a half years.

Karan Thapar: Were you actually learning the trade and the profession or were you simply observing?

A.R.Rahman: Almost yes, mostly observing.

Karan Thapar: At first hand?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: At the same time I gather you were also doing your own musical training and it wasn't just Carnatic music. You also did a degree course at the Trinity College of Music?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, in piano.

Karan Thapar: What did you learn, Classical Piano?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, Classical Piano.

Karan Thapar: Any particular composer?

A.R.Rahman: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven.

Karan Thapar: You are speaking of favourites, I gather?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, because I played all the compositions, at least most of them.

Karan Thapar: About this time in your teens you were also a member of several rock bands?

A.R.Rahman: Rock, fusion, and all that stuff. Most of the studio musicians, some very good, joined together and we formed a pop band. We played in a pop band called Magic which had just one performance. And then later it converted into a fusion band: Shivamani, John Anthony, Jojo, myself and Raja. Live performances were not too

many because we were all studio musicians; we couldn't get used to that kind of schedule. Each person had recordings and it didn't go much further. But we backed Ravi Shankar when he came to India and performed in India as a fusion artist.

Karan Thapar: But the rock bands were just fun. You weren't actually professionally into them?

A.R.Rahman: Both, actually. We wanted to get into something new, since we were playing the same kind of music over and over again, film music.

Karan Thapar: Okay, in '87, you began a stint for four or four and a half years as a composer of music for advertising jingles?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Did you enjoy that?

A.R.Rahman: Yes. I met completely new people with different attitudes. And that changed my whole perspective on music. For example, they would expect me to do a Kenny G, and do a Deep Purple, and then suddenly do a *kirtan*, and they would want a *thumri*, so I was exposed to all the kinds of music which influenced me, to create what I'm doing now.

Karan Thapar: What about the fact that in advertising you have to make a musical point within thirty seconds? Was that an important lesson?

A.R.Rahman: Very much. Especially in the South (I mean Madras), most of the stuff was being made in Bombay and for it to sell I would need it to be extremely good, since we didn't have any big names. If it was not good enough, they would instantly say, 'No, we'll go to Bombay and do it again.' So we had a much tougher time doing ads in Madras than I would have had in Bombay.

Karan Thapar: Give me an idea of the sort of ads and campaigns you worked on.

A.R.Rahman: I think the major one was by Rajiv Menon, it was called Allwyn Trendy. It goes *(sings)* 'Allwyn Trendy, Allwyn Trendy', something like that. And the other major one which clicked in the South was Leo Coffee. It was a very Carnatic interpretation.

Karan Thapar: How does that go?

A.R.Rahman: I can't sing it.

Karan Thapar: Hum it.

A.R.Rahman: *(hums)* Something like that.

Karan Thapar: So while you were doing the advertising jingles, was the ambition to move on to grander, more comprehensive music, being born inside you?

A.R.Rahman: In fact, no, because I was very satisfied and almost happy with advertising; since I was into movies for over a decade, I wanted to get out of it. I said, 'No more movies, I'm sick of it.' But things changed and there was a different generation of directors coming in, like Mani Ratnam, and that gave me hope to do movies again.

Karan Thapar: But the interesting thing is that movies weren't by any means an ambition. In fact in a way, you were content with advertising?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Okay, I'm going to take a break here because in Part II I want to talk about the career you've made in movies and the sort of music you've written and the fact that it all happened, I believe, almost by accident.

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: We'll be back in just a couple of moments. Stay with us.

~*~

Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is A.R. Rahman. Let's talk a little about the music that you've been making and that has made such an impact. It all began in a sense in '91 when Mani Ratnam asked you to do the music for *Roja*. But I believe the whole thing happened at a chance meeting.

A.R.Rahman: Yes, we had this party thrown by Mani Ratnam's cousin sister. I just told you about this Leo Coffee ad which we did and that won an award; Mani was there in the party. It was a surprise to see him there and that's when we first met and then I invited him to the studio. He took up the invitation six months later and came there and said, 'I might do a film; let me just hear your music.' And then he said, 'Give me some tunes.' I gave him some tunes and I thought he'll reject all of them. But he said, 'Give me more.' I didn't ask him anything, I gave him more. Then he said, 'I like all of them.' It was a surprise for me to get an answer like that. And we were supposed to start a film called *Thiruda Thiruda*. But suddenly he said, 'No, we're doing a film called *Roja* with producer K. Balachander'—a legend. And that was a surprise again. I think it was fate, destiny which happened.

Karan Thapar: When you were making this music and in a sense identifying your style, did Mani Ratnam play a role in helping you decide, 'This is yours, this is not yours?'

A.R.Rahman: Yes, since I was too involved in most of the film work in the South, my intention was to do something new, but I didn't know how to do it. I had certain parts of mine which were completely original, and I had some parts which were not original, sound wise. And so he helped me pick up the right stuff and shake up my sound which came out of *Roja*.

Karan Thapar: You're very right when you say that original is the word to use to describe your music. If I were to say that its brilliance lies in the fact that it has, on the one hand, western influences and on the other hand, it is influenced by classical Hindustani and Carnatic music, would you disagree with that?

A.R.Rahman: Lot of people give different explanations for the success of my music. Some people say that it's just the recording and nothing else; some say it's just rhythm, some say it's the tune, some say it's the lyrics. So I wouldn't classify my music as something. It's like water, it's just a culmination by nature.

Karan Thapar: You mean it's like a mixture of H_2 and O, which together creates ...

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: I must say, it's a miracle.

A.R.Rahman: Yes, I think it's a blessing from God.

Karan Thapar: Do you believe that?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Do you believe that in a sense, your musical inspiration is God speaking to you?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, because every time you do music, or you do a tune, you never know how it will end. When you know what you're going to do, it doesn't come out well. It's almost like a replica of something that you've done before. But when you're like a blank paper and something fresh comes in, then you know instinctively that this is something which I never had before. It's come in. And it's a surprise for me also, sometimes.

Karan Thapar: So it's those moments of chance, when you don't expect it and suddenly you come up with it, that convinces you it is God's gift.

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Do you believe in destiny as well?

A.R.Rahman: I believe in destiny and I also believe that destiny can be changed by prayers. And most of all, for music you need peace in your mind and you need spiritual power to control things. You can't feel, 'Ok, now I have to do a tune which will come on the charts' or 'I have to do a tune which is going to be a super hit in Tamil and Hindi'.

Karan Thapar: That's the inspiration given to you by God and religion.

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: That's why, in your mind religion and music go together?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: If your father, the Late Mr Shekhar, were to hear your music, how do you think he'd have responded?

A.R.Rahman: I think he might have been happy; I don't know much about him, but I've seen him work like a slave. Whenever I used to play at the studios, all the musicians who had a very good vibe with him would say, 'Your father was the first one who'd pulled me into this field and he made me a musician... he made me sit there and... I didn't know music and he'd give me money and then I'd start improving on it.' So from all these talks I came to know that he was a very good person at heart. I think it's a blessing from him and his soul.

Karan Thapar: So along with your belief in God, the image you carry of your father remains an important musical inspiration to you.

A.R.Rahman: Yes. My mother also, she's a big critic. When she heard the first song which I did, '*Dil hai chhota*

sa' she said 'It's brilliant,' and she started crying. And she sometimes hears some of the songs and she says 'Oh, that's too much. I'll have to pray that this song becomes a success.'

Karan Thapar: Your music today is thought of by most people as very dependant on beat. And many people feel, as a result, the lyrics can't be heard, or they're ignored. How do you respond to that sort of comment?

A.R.Rahman: See, for each film a kind of sound is required. So for a film like *Rangeela* I needed more of youth, and for a film like *Taal*, I needed more of rhythm and melody. But I believe that none of the songs can survive without melody. There is a melody and there is a thought. But it is hidden sometimes and you may notice it later.

Karan Thapar: So all those people who say that Rahman's music is all beat are simply unable to hear the melody?

A.R.Rahman: Exactly. I think they're able to feel the melody but they're not able to identify the melody. It could be because most of the songs are shaped differently.

Karan Thapar: Let me share a comment with you. Many people say that Rahman's music grows on one. The more you hear it, the more you like it. Does that suggest that its appeal is more to the head than the heart, more cerebral than emotional?

A.R.Rahman: I wouldn't agree with that. When you have a *raga* or a tune, and the tune goes in the same way in which some old song had been done before, you will like it immediately because some kind of nostalgia is being affected; and then gradually you get sick of it. You say, 'I don't want to listen to it. I've had enough.' But when

you hear something new it doesn't attract you the first time. And a little later, slowly you feel, 'What is this?'

Karan Thapar: So you're saying that the unusualness needs time for one to appreciate it?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, exactly.

Karan Thapar: So again when people turn around and say that so much of his music sounds the same and they accuse you of being repetitive, you're honourably suggesting they haven't heard it properly?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, I think so. But no one is perfect and there are some sounds which are beyond me; I mean I might have duplicated some instrument or something like that. And then they hear something which is peculiar, like a recorder or an Irish flute which is not used conventionally in Indian films, then they immediately say, 'Oh, it's sounding like that song.' It's not the melody, but it's the instrument which is being used again in my music.

Karan Thapar: So it's the sound that's misleading them, rather than the melody?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Okay, I noticed that in recent years, you've begun to do a lot of music that's not strictly to do with films, like *Vande Mataram*, *Ekum Satyam*, with Michael Jackson, and then *Jana Gana Mana*. Are you looking consciously for avenues outside the world of films?

A.R.Rahman: In films we have a limitation of having just six or seven categories of songs like love songs, sad songs, and then a group song, and a marriage song and things like that. And then you get ideas, as a musician, to do something else. You don't find a platform to do that. So that's when I started getting interested in doing albums.

Karan Thapar: You also suggest that you're looking for new challenges all the time?

A.R.Rahman: Yes. Somewhere you're not complacent and you work from square one again.

Karan Thapar: Do you get bored very easily, by just doing the same sort of film music?

A.R.Rahman: Once in three years I get bored.

Karan Thapar: So once in three years you feel you have to do something different?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: When you did *Ekum Satyam* with Michael Jackson you had to get him to sing Sanskrit lyrics and words. Was that difficult?

A.R.Rahman: He didn't sing it. He had just interpreted it like an explanation in English, which will be released after his album's out.

Karan Thapar: Was that an interesting experience for you, working with one of the world's, possibly *the* world's best?

A.R.Rahman: It's very strange you know. We were making a song and when I had the opportunity to meet him, I missed it because I was more interested in doing the song and Bharat and Kanika met him. And then when the meeting was fixed, he had an unfortunate accident and his video was played when my concert was on. So he was there on the screen for the audience but he was not on the stage. He was in the ambulance.

Karan Thapar: Another instance of fate intervening. And the strange thing is that you believe in fate!

A.R.Rahman: Yes, very true.

Karan Thapar: You are about to embark on perhaps the most adventurous venture of all. You're going to do

a western style musical called *Bombay Dreams* with Andrew Lloyd Weber. How did that come about?

A.R.Rahman: Sir Andrew Lloyd Weber had listened to one of the Bollywood numbers—maybe mine—on TV. And then a couple of years later when Shekhar Kapur met him to do *The Phantom of the Opera*, he said—just to break the ice and because he wanted to extend the conversation—'Can I see some Bollywood numbers?' And that's when Shekhar Kapur played '*Chhayya Chhayya*' and '*Dil Se*' and the other stuff from my music.

Karan Thapar: Mere accidents. What else can fate do, huh?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, and that's why I got a call from him.

Karan Thapar: So one day the phone rang?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: And what happened when you picked it up?

A.R.Rahman: I picked it up. Shekhar said, 'I want you to talk to somebody.' And I said, 'Who?' He said, 'Just speak to him.' And then, 'I'm Andrew Lloyd Weber. And I love your music.' It was quite a surprise. Then I met him later and he said, 'Let me produce a musical ... I want young composers coming up,' and things like that.

Karan Thapar: So the music is going to be entirely yours. He's not going to have any role in the music? And this musical, *Bombay Dreams*, what's the story?

A.R.Rahman: That's what we're looking for. We've almost got one and we're working on it.

Karan Thapar: And when does it happen?

A.R.Rahman: It will happen in the second half of 2001.

Karan Thapar: And will it be in London or Delhi or somewhere else?

A.R.Rahman: I wish it were Delhi, Bombay, London, Japan, New York ...

Karan Thapar: All over the world?

A.R.Rahman: God willing. Let's see.

Karan Thapar: So you're really ambitious with this one. Have you got good vibes and feelings about it, or are you a little nervous and tense?

A.R.Rahman: I was a bit nervous until it started but after that everything started falling into place and I'm ok now. But it's a lot of hard work from all sides.

Karan Thapar: And have you, in your mind, got lead actors and singers for it?

A.R.Rahman: No, nothing. It's all from scratch.

Karan Thapar: So as you said earlier, there's a piece of blank paper and you're waiting for God to fill it up for you?

A.R.Rahman: Yes, exactly.

Karan Thapar: So those songs that you create will once again be Rahman's God talking to him.

A.R.Rahman: God willing.

Karan Thapar: You've been through this interview. We began by asking you, 'You don't talk very much about yourself. You're shy.'

A.R.Rahman: I think I've talked too much.

Karan Thapar: Do you really think so?

A.R.Rahman: I think I should work now.

Karan Thapar: But you've told us for the first time on record what life was like for A.R. Rahman, the struggle, the belief in God. Up till now these have been things that you've always hidden from the world. And hereafter, will we see perhaps a different Rahman, a more talkative Rahman, a more communicative Rahman?

A.R.Rahman: No.

Karan Thapar: No?

A.R.Rahman: I'm just going to be more productive musically.

Karan Thapar: You're going to go back into your shell?

A.R.Rahman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Rahman, I wish you the best of luck. The world is going to look forward to *Bombay Dreams*, and certainly I'm going to be one of them. Thank you for a lovely evening.

A.R.Rahman: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 26 April 2000.

Bombay Dreams *premiered in London in the summer of 2002.*

Aishwarya Rai

She has been Miss India and Miss World. Now she is Bollywood's top actress and she makes it all seem so simple. So what's the secret of her success? Well, today is your chance to find out in one of her rare interviews. Let me introduce you to Aishwarya Rai.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Aishwarya.

Aishwarya Rai: Thank you.

Karan Thapar: It's amazing that your first film *Iruvar* was only released only in 1997 and yet three years later you have swept all the major best actress awards and you are considered the number one. Are you surprised by your success?

Aishwarya Rai: *(laughs)* Success is a relative term and I always say that you could enjoy it and not believe it. As simple as that because everybody has their own definition and parameters of what success is all about; probably achieving contentment and growing everyday, enjoying my art while learning it, is to some extent what I'd call success.

Karan Thapar: So what about the fan following, the adulation, the kids queuing up for autographs, doesn't that mean anything?

Aishwarya Rai: Of course it is special. It is special because it must be taking up a lot of their time for people

to come forth and to ask for autographs; they are just showing their love.

Karan Thapar: It all has happened so quickly in just three or four years. Do you sometimes pinch yourself and ask if this is for real?

Aishwarya Rai: For me interacting with people, with the public, has been going on for longer than three years. It's been since pre-Miss World actually, ever since my modelling days. I love the interaction—I have probably got used to it; I must admit that it feels to good to have received the recognition and the appreciation in this new world because there were a lot of pre-conceived notions.

Karan Thapar: A newcomer can't do it.

Aishwarya Rai: And a model and a beauty queen at it, never!

Karan Thapar: But that's the real thrill. You have proved the world wrong?

Aishwarya Rai: With a lot of guidance, help and support.

Karan Thapar: But it was a challenge, wasn't it? You rose to the challenge and that's the real thrill?

Aishwarya Rai: Well, all right. You want me to confess. It has been a thrill, it has been a joy, it has satisfied me to be able to answer and put to rest a lot of pre-conceived notions.

Karan Thapar: Ok. Let's go back to what I call the beginning of the Aishwarya Rai story. I gather along with your parents it was only your brother Aditya and you. Was it a very close knit family?

Aishwarya Rai: Yes, definitely. The little joke about my brother is that he is elder than me and yet he's taken to be my younger brother, and it is probably because I

have always just been so grown up. As a kid I was tough as a granny. And here is my brother who is more reticent, more controlled, more mature. You actually dub that as mature, but because I am so over the top I almost come across with time as far older than him. Also because of the experiences I have had that obviously open doors, change parameters, change your entire perspective to life.

Karan Thapar: So here's the little sis who has become the big grand mom.

Aishwarya Rai: And now more so it is such a joke, even with the media. Recently we were at a function as a family and we were all clicked together and they actually wrote 'little brother Aditya'. I said, 'You can't do this to me.' And my brother cracks up. It has just become a regular thing, not just in the media. If we go somewhere and introduce ourselves, this is my brother Aditya, and he says, 'Hi, and I am elder to her,' we know the reaction—really I don't know how to react to that, I don't know if that is a compliment or not.

Karan Thapar: Your mom also said that you were the most talkative child.

Aishwarya Rai: You can see that already. I am hardly giving you a chance to throw questions!

Karan Thapar: So you were not shy. No nerves?

Aishwarya Rai: No nerves, simply because there were no pretences. People always thought that there was a veneer. There was this whole ice maiden aura that people perceived me to have. And that's probably because I gauge people more.

Karan Thapar: So underneath that placid exterior is a cold cruel calculating mind.

Aishwarya Rai: You tell me.

Karan Thapar: What do you say?

Aishwarya Rai: Do you call someone who gauges people that she wants to interact with 'cold and calculating'? I don't think those two go together.

Karan Thapar: Shrewd will you say?

Aishwarya Rai: Ah, you are taking all the negative terms. That's not fair. It is probably being careful and maybe even defensive to some extent because you don't want to open yourself up to just about everybody.

Karan Thapar: You protect yourself.

Aishwarya Rai: I think naturally yes; today in hindsight I'd say yes, probably, subconsciously.

Karan Thapar: Are you vulnerable? Do you get hurt easily?

Aishwarya Rai: Yes, probably that's the reason.

Karan Thapar: They say right through your school days you were always the best in whatever you tried to do. I gather you were always top in your class. Were you a crammer?

Aishwarya Rai: No I was not a crammer. I was lucky. I think God gifted me with a bit of photographic memory. So I managed to take it in on the nth moment and still be able to deliver.

Karan Thapar: After coming up tops in your class for many years, suddenly when you came to the tenth grade it didn't work out.

Aishwarya Rai: You have been told. Yes. Yes I think that is when I really appreciated coming tops.

Karan Thapar: How did you feel coming eighth in rank?

Aishwarya Rai: Oh right, you have been told even that. Yes, that was a huge disappointment. That's when I appreciated the rank that I had had all along and when

they expected the most in the tenth grade—it is the board and is she going to break the record this year, is she going to top—and it is not first nor second nor third, but eighth. It was a huge disappointment. And I felt like an absolute failure.

Karan Thapar: Did that setback make you a little better as a person?

Aishwarya Rai: Yes. 'A person'. I like the way Karan is judging and saying that I had a problem within my personality. No, I think it made me more appreciative.

Karan Thapar: Of success?

Aishwarya Rai: Of success and definitely prepared me for life being as cyclic as it is. It prepared me for the wave pattern in life—that you ride the crest and you go through the trough, sort of like the Buddhist method: the middle path of life. This incident made me lead my life that way.

Karan Thapar: Seems like it also made you a bit more philosophical.

Aishwarya Rai: Yes, definitely. I grew up a lot and I am glad it really prepared me for what life is all about.

Karan Thapar: You talk about what life is all about. You became a part of everyone's life when you won Miss India. Tell me, what made you compete in that competition?

Aishwarya Rai: I must confess it was no trial of ambition. There was no goal that I have to be Miss India.

Karan Thapar: It was an accident?

Aishwarya Rai: Probably by virtue of being in the media world since I was already modelling.

Karan Thapar: You did it for luck?

Aishwarya Rai: Honestly, and it was the same with my decision to join movies.

Karan Thapar: So were you surprised when you won?
Aishwarya Rai: It felt very good but I did come second.
Karan Thapar: Just by one point.
Aishwarya Rai: Yes.
Karan Thapar: Was that disappointing?
Aishwarya Rai: No. The media just played it up, creating this huge disappointment and huge failure, which is what takes me back to my tenth grade result. I did not perceive this as a failure because one does not fail in life. It did not set me back any which way. It was just a competition.

Karan Thapar: Did it also end up as the Susmita Sen – Aishwarya Rai rivalry?

Aishwarya Rai: Exactly. Which was absolutely unfair because we were just two participants who took part and by the grace of God, did well even later internationally. So there was no need for this little tamasha that happened, but it did.

Karan Thapar: The tamasha went completely huge when you won Miss World eleven months later. At what point of that very coveted competition did you say to yourself, 'I think I have got a chance'?

Aishwarya Rai: Never, on the contrary I felt that the signs are the same as Miss India. All the signs during the competition, this I have never spoken about, were exactly as it had happened during Miss India. There was this whole level of expectation out of me. Strangely and wonderfully, the same thing happened at Miss World. Even though you go as an absolute non-entity and you are just a participant from your country, you are still representing India. Within that month I had become very popular and there was a lot of Indian and international

press. Amongst the select few contestants I was judged as definitely a very strong contestant and a probable winner. I felt this can't be happening again to me. I don't quite like the feel of it. And then just before I left for Miss India, my zip for the final gown had split and my gown was brought by the designer to Goa; my contest was in Goa. These are little things and it's not that I am superstitious. The same thing happened during the Miss World. On the evening that I was flying out I did this final trial and this zip split. And it all had to be repaired, so it came in later. It was ridiculous. I am not even superstitious but all the signs were the same. I told myself I am just going to enjoy this competition and the experience was honestly wonderful.

Karan Thapar: So when you won you completely covered your face with your hands.

Aishwarya Rai: That's what happened.

Karan Thapar: Was it disbelief or . . .

Aishwarya Rai: It was joy and later on I kicked myself. In all the beauty contests we have the girls go OOOOOO; so we do this in every rehearsal and we just fool around.

Karan Thapar: You didn't want to do it for real?

Aishwarya Rai: I didn't want to and it happened. It just goes to show that this really is a spontaneous reaction and this happened over the years with all the girls probably.

Karan Thapar: But at the one moment when you wanted to be yourself you found yourself?

Aishwarya Rai: That was myself. That has probably been the case with every winner. Even if we made fun of it, it was a spontaneous reaction, trust me.

Karan Thapar: I will just take a break and when I come back we'll talk about Aishwarya Rai the actress,

the girl that features in probably every man's dream. We'll be back in a couple of minutes, so stick with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back, my guest is Aishwarya Rai. Ash, let's talk a little about your career as an actress, which is how the world knows you today. Your first film *Iruvar* they say wasn't the world's greatest hit. Was it a disappointment?

Aishwarya Rai: No, because I was not here to work in a hit, I was here to work in movies. What decides the box office result is very subjective. I have said this very often—joining the movies was no stepping stone or platform to fame, popularity, getting acquainted with media, appearing on magazine covers, doing interviews. That was not my objective at all. That had all happened before, that phase was over.

Karan Thapar: So you really wanted to be an actress? It was the talent that you wanted to show.

Aishwarya Rai: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Except that bad luck happened again with *Aur Pyaar Ho Gaya*, your first Hindi film. Once again you weren't considered to be a success. And two in a row must have been difficult to handle?

Aishwarya Rai: No, because my perspective is very, very different. I look at my life by not following any fixed notion. Not the way the rest of the world looks at it. I decide how I see my life and the event.

Karan Thapar: This is again a business philosophy, isn't it?

Aishwarya Rai: My own philosophy, the way life has taught me. So, that's why I keep that tenth standard

incident as an important event in the family or probably in my life. I guess it was God's way of setting my perspective on my life.

Karan Thapar: And it gave you a balance?

Aishwarya Rai: An absolute and a complete balance.

Karan Thapar: Aishwarya, if I may interrupt, it wasn't just you that was different. Sometimes the comments that are made about you, after those first two movies that you did, used to be like, 'She is too beautiful to be an actress.' 'Her features are too perfect to show emotion.' How do you cope with that rather strange slap-in-the-face criticism that was also a compliment?

Aishwarya Rai: That's what I mean: opinions have always been two sides of the coin for me in life, that's why I keep going back to school. While you are a topper, you do really well, at the same time they think, 'No, there can't be a brain behind that face.' So at the same time while you know you can act, there is already a pre-conceived notion.

Karan Thapar: There can't be a brain behind the face. Do you think because you are so beautiful people assume 'Oh maybe she is not that intelligent'?

Aishwarya Rai: But then I can't keep living on an assumption. I have to live my life and life will speak for itself, and by the grace of God it has all along.

Karan Thapar: It seems the way people perceive you as an actress changed dramatically in 1999 with *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* and then again with *Taal*. Why do you think these two movies clicked?

Aishwarya Rai: That is not for me to tell. If I knew those answers, every movie would be a *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* or a *Taal*.

Karan Thapar: You need good strong directors to bring out your talent, is that what made a difference in these two movies?

Aishwarya Rai: I wouldn't decry the rest of my directors either. I wouldn't say that the directors were not fun to work with or that I did not learn anything from them. No, that's not true but yes, the director is very important to me and that applies to every Hindi movie that I've worked in. I believe that I am a director's actress because it is the director's conviction in the character that increases my conviction in it and that's what you eventually see and so when there is absolute conviction and I enjoy working with that unit, in that role with that director, it shows.

Karan Thapar: So can I put it this way—the more clearheaded a director, and the better the rapport between him and you, the better your performance?

Aishwarya Rai: And the fact that I am enjoying doing what I am; I think that is what it is eventually. I think it shows.

Karan Thapar: Enjoying is something very important to you. You really need to enjoy acting?

Aishwarya Rai: Enjoy what I am doing. I have got to enjoy my character, I have got to enjoy the unit I am working with, and that shows. At the end of the day we are all human; you watch a movie in three hours or two and a half hours, whatever the duration, but that's about hundred days of my life.

Karan Thapar: True.

Aishwarya Rai: And I am human.

Karan Thapar: Can I put it to you this way, at the end of day what would be more important to you—to be

remembered for your beautiful looks or your subtle acting talent?

Aishwarya Rai: Definitely the latter. I am here as an actress and I would definitely want to be remembered as an actress. Looks is something I was born with, I have lived with, and it's going to fade with life. This is something I have made for myself.

Karan Thapar: You are not conscious of being one of the most beautiful women on screen?

Aishwarya Rai: Don't embarrass me now. I don't know how to react to these things.

Karan Thapar: Your friends say that she is a very determined lady, she always does what she wants and she says what she believes in. Is that correct?

Aishwarya Rai: I definitely say what I believe and I believe in what I do.

Karan Thapar: Are you also outspoken or are you diplomatic and discreet?

Aishwarya Rai: I am outspoken to the extent that I wouldn't mince my words in putting forth my opinion. I am very honest and direct. But if being kind is being diplomatic then that is what I am. When I am outspoken I am sensitive to the other human being. That's important to me. People's sentiments are important to me because it's so easy for me to put myself into their shoes and there are ways of saying things; you can be outspoken and direct and not hit below the belt.

Karan Thapar: So what you are saying is I don't want to be hurtful but at the same time I want people to take me for the way I am. I don't want to put on an act.

Aishwarya Rai: Definitely. There are no pretences. There never have been.

Karan Thapar: Now, you have become the subject of a lot of gossip and lot of film magazine speculation. Do you resent the intrusion into your privacy?

Aishwarya Rai: These are film magazines that have always existed along with the film industry, and there is nothing that one can really do.

Karan Thapar: Is that another one of your philosophies?

Aishwarya Rai: Yes, there is very little you can do.

Karan Thapar: So you take it in your stride?

Aishwarya Rai: You take it in your stride. Thankfully today I am very appreciative of this media where people listen to me as I speak, and get to see who I am.

Karan Thapar: A lot of speculation is rife about that central question: when will she get married? Is marriage imminent?

Aishwarya Rai: Eventually in everyone's life obviously it is. So it would be and when it does the world would know about it

Karan Thapar: Can I ask how far is eventually?

Aishwarya Rai: If only I knew how far away everything in life is. Just like every other aspect of it, I really can't say.

Karan Thapar: But it is something you take in your stride. It is not something that you are determined to do just to keep everyone else happy and to keep the gossips at bay?

Aishwarya Rai: No, it is all part of life. There is nothing that I have ever done pandering or catering to anything in any aspect of my life.

Karan Thapar: Last year when the magazines were absolutely convinced that you are going to marry Salman, they all gave you a very tough time. In fact there was a moment when you fell down the stairs and they were convinced he had beaten you up.

Aishwarya Rai: Like they did when I fell down the stairs during Miss India. They were convinced that's why I lost. So people always have their reasons and they will always create a story around it. But when I get an opportunity I tell the truth as it is and then it is left to you to believe it.

Karan Thapar: Can I ask you what happened when you fell down the stairs and why did people end up saying that Salman had beaten you up?

Aishwarya Rai: I don't know what to say—I don't know why people claim or say what people do. But the fact is that I slipped. I actually passed out and fell down the stairs outside my house.

Karan Thapar: It was exhaustion and it had nothing to do with Salman whatsoever?

Aishwarya Rai: Obviously. But then you can't go around saying 'Oh, I am so exhausted and I fainted' because then the industry would panic at that point in time and then they would turn around and say 'Oh, she is overworked.'

Karan Thapar: Do you find the media more responsive and more responsible this year than it was last year?

Aishwarya Rai: The fact is that I have never really pandered and catered to the media all these years, because then it's this ridiculous pattern that follows where you are offering explanations for everything in life. And the only reason that I even spoke about this was because I genuinely felt that someone else was being victimized unnecessarily, our families were being roped in. My family, his family, people were being unnecessarily put through pain and we were a media spectacle for no rhyme or reason. It is a symbiotic relationship, the industry and

the media. But you can't cross parameters and turn around and character assassinate. If you recognize sensitivities of communities, of a country, you recognize sensitive issues. I think the media has the responsibility not to cross parameters and they have done that and they misquote people, they put words into people's mouths which can become very sensitive issues. And I think this is where I actually reach out and request the media to recognize the responsibility.

Karan Thapar: So how much of it do you feel gets made up by the press. How often do you read something and say, 'Hey, who is this about, not me clearly'?

Aishwarya Rai: I don't know, it's been very strange because it wouldn't be fair of me to generalize and say oh stop the press, or the press has been so unfair. No, that's not true, a large faction of the press has been wonderful and I have been interacting with them all along, right from the onset, but then again that's what surprises me. Because every time a representative of the press came and met me, they keep coming up with 'You are not what you project yourself to be.' What I want to ask is, 'Who projected me as who you perceive me to be?' You guys project me as something, you guys come up to me and say you are not what you are made out to be and then again years later it is still the same thing.

Karan Thapar: So the press creates an image, gets taken in by the image, doesn't realize it's false. When they meet the real Aishwarya Rai they are surprised?

Aishwarya Rai: They turn around and say we are so surprised. So who created person a and who is person b and who are you surprised by and then again what are you going to project me as now?

Karan Thapar: So today have I got the real Aishwarya Rai?

Aishwarya Rai: You tell me, do you think this is being pretentious?

Karan Thapar: Tell me, you are only twenty-seven and you have been Miss India, you have been Miss World, you are the number one actress. What next?

Aishwarya Rai: I don't know, twenty-eight?

Karan Thapar: You take one year at a time?

Aishwarya Rai: Oh! One moment at a time, a day at a time.

Karan Thapar: I read that you want to direct?

Aishwarya Rai: No, it is my directors who have been teasing me about that. It started with Sanjay—they are all just teases. Every time I get work I really love discussing it with them, really getting into what it is all about, maybe not necessarily my scene, but the story, another scene, another shot. That's what I enjoy about the work.

Karan Thapar: A director is beginning to emerge even if you don't admit it.

Aishwarya Rai: Tease me, tease me. Like I said, there never has been any pre-planning for anything in my life.

Karan Thapar: You haven't made up your mind as yet, but who knows one day Aishwarya Rai the director might be here too.

Aishwarya Rai: I don't know: I told you—a moment at a time.

Karan Thapar: Aishwarya, thank you for a wonderful interview, and we look forward to seeing the birth of a director.

Aishwarya Rai: Thanks.

This interview was telecast on 20 June 2001.

Aishwarya Rai has not directed a film yet, but became the first Indian actress to get lead roles in mainstream Hollywood cinema.

Amartya Sen

'The world's foremost academic' may be a factual description of him but it hardly does justice to his personality. He's also a man of strong convictions and a gentleman of the old school, full of charm and wit. So what is he actually like? Well, here's your chance to find out as I introduce you to Amartya Sen.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme.

Amartya Sen: Thank you very much. Thank you for asking me.

Karan Thapar: Let's go back to 14 October 1998. You're in New York; it's five in the morning and the phone rings. Would you ever have expected that you were just about to win the Nobel Prize?

Amartya Sen: I think it's a very difficult question to answer. I was quite sleepy. Of course, I'd flown in the night before. I'd come up for the memorial meeting of my late friend, so I was in a very sad mood generally, and I knew I was going to make a speech about that later that day. Well, there had been some talk about my getting the Nobel, and I had even appeared on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* two years before I actually got it, as a likely candidate to get it. But I didn't know that they were announcing the Nobel that day. I certainly did not think of that at all when the phone rang because my first

thought was that something dreadful must have happened to the children, otherwise why was I being woken up at an ungodly hour of five o'clock in the morning, which is of course eleven in Stockholm.

Karan Thapar: One of the first things you did was to ring your mother. She didn't believe you, did she? She was a bit reluctant to accept the news.

Amartya Sen: Well, I'd first called my wife, who did believe it. My mother I think did say she'd fully believe it once she sees it on the television. But yes, I think there had been a certain amount of discussion about my getting it. The Calcutta papers had been full of the possibility of it happening.

Karan Thapar: So as you're saying, a speculation had been carried on for many years and some had come around to saying, 'Maybe he won't get it.'

Amartya Sen: No, I think in my mother's case it was something like an annual ritual where the papers might mention it and nothing of the kind might happen. So that was what it was. So her remark that she will have to wait until the television or the papers put it forward wasn't entirely a silly reaction.

Karan Thapar: Earlier that year in 1998, you'd also just become Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. It's probably the most coveted post in British academic life. In a strange way, did that mean more?

Amartya Sen: Yes, I think it did, yes. You know, for one thing it was much more unexpected. At the Trinity College, Mastership is appointed by the Prime Minister. You get a letter from the Queen in fact. But the call comes from Downing Street. The Appointment Secretary spends some time in the college and tries to get the views of

people. So they have views, which are reflected. But the ultimate decision is made formally by the Queen and communicated by the Prime Minister. And I was actually in the Bank of Italy, when there was a phone call and I was told that there was a telephone call from Downing Street for me, and it appeared to me as extremely unlikely. But I was told then that the Prime Minister wanted to send me a letter. And I was told it was about the Mastership of the Trinity College. My wife was in England and I called her. I said, 'Look, you know, they must have a short list, and they want me to express views about that,' and I was very flattered that they wanted me to express my priorities on that. But it turned out that by the time I got to Harvard in fact they were offering me this position. Initially, Karan, I was very surprised, very honoured and flattered, but also felt that wasn't really the right thing to do. I'd been happy in Harvard. And I did terrifically fine.

Karan Thapar: So you didn't jump at it?

Amartya Sen: No, not so. Actually I took two months to decide. That was a very hard time because, you don't discuss this at all of course, because if I were not to take it, then no one should have known that this had been offered. And as it happened, I was visiting England a couple of times during that period. And I had lunch in the college. And there was regular speculation going on and I was also told that there were two names, two pictures that had been published in *The Guardian*. And I was asked which of these two are more likely.

Karan Thapar: Whereas you knew the actual answer all the while yourself.

Amartya Sen: It was very difficult you know, and so I had to join in on that. By the time both months were over

it was clear to both my wife and me that I would be very silly not to take it because it's a very unusual job.

Karan Thapar: In fact 1998 was a year when several things came your way because just after the Nobel Prize, you got the Bharat Ratna. Being honoured in that way by your own country – did that mean anything special to you?

Amartya Sen: Yes, indeed. The Bharat Ratna of course is such an exceptional thing. Of course it's an odd thing here, because it can also be awarded posthumously. So it's not quite clear what is the field of comparison. But I was very honoured. Ravi Shankar was a co-recipient of the Bharat Ratna with me.

Karan Thapar: And where were you when you got the call for this award? It was New York for the Nobel, the Bank of Italy for the Mastership of the Trinity College ...

Amartya Sen: Well, this was in fact in Trinity College that I was called up. In Trinity the Bharat Ratna is not understood at all. In fact, I think the college Secretary put up a notice on the notice board saying that I'd got that. And I remember one of colleagues who told me he'd read that I'd got the Bharat Ratna and he said, 'Congratulations Master, for whatever it is you have got.' And then he said, 'Explain to me what it is.' So I said, 'Well, it's meant to be a reasonably high honour given by the Government of India.' And then I mentioned that my co-recipient was Ravi Shankar. And then he said, 'Oh gosh! Well in that case it must be a very distinguished honour.' So I said, 'Yes, indeed.'

Karan Thapar: Let's go back to the beginning of what I call the 'Amartya Sen Story'. You were named by

Rabindranath Tagore. Your father and your grandfather were both academics. What sort of childhood did you have?

Amartya Sen: Well, an academically oriented childhood, you know, born in a campus, in Shantiniketan. My grandfather was teaching there, and my father was teaching in Dhaka University. My paternal side is from Dhaka. And my father was a professor in Dhaka University. My grandfather had also been connected with the University. Indeed he was the first Treasurer of Dhaka University. So I grew up close to the Dhaka University area. I alternated between Shantiniketan and Dhaka. But they both had a very academic atmosphere. I liked the life of an academic. I liked then the things that I still do like. I like the time to think, the time to interact with students, it's marvellous.

Karan Thapar: There was something else you liked a lot in Shantiniketan when you went to school. You were very fond of your bicycle and it's been with you almost ever since, hasn't it?

Amartya Sen: It had. Unfortunately it's no longer with me, actually because in this context of the centenary of the Nobel Prizes, that bike along with two books I was fond of, disappeared into the Nobel Museum, which is at the moment at Stockholm, and then it's supposed to go to America and to Japan and so on, go around. So the bike actually is a kind of exhibit, mounted high up on the wall. It was quite thrilling to see my bike stuck there. I think I must have got it when I was nine or ten or something. I could barely manage the full height at that time. This was a twenty-two-inch bike because that's all I could manage. So at the moment it's a bit low. But I think the

reason the Nobel Museum took it is that some of the work I did, for example collecting the information about prices and rates data in the neighboring farms, whenever there was an account ...

Karan Thapar: You went on the bike?

Amartya Sen: Yes, I went on the bike. And similarly when I was doing my work on gender inequality weighing boys and girls in the villages—I weighed every child in those villages, to compare the boys and girls in different ages to see how girls and boys are born with much the same kind of nutritional state and weight and over time, even within five years, girls fall behind as compared to boys, in a way that indicates, not so much differential feeding but more differential medical access. The boy is taken to a hospital or to a doctor, of course, much more easily than a girl. I couldn't have done all that, couldn't have been that mobile ...

Karan Thapar: Without the bike?

Amartya Sen: In that territory, you need one; no car will go there anyway.

Karan Thapar: During those bike years, there were two cataclysmic events that you witnessed first hand. The first was the Bengal Famine of 1943; you were barely nine or ten. What exactly did you see and what sort of impact did it have on you?

Amartya Sen: Well, as you might expect, had a kind of devastating impact because I didn't know what was going on. There were some peculiar features about it, the suddenness: suddenly one deranged man came in and we didn't know what was happening. I knew later that that's the characteristic of starving for a long time. Then five, ten, hundred, a thousand were all over, walking along

the way from some of the famine districts to Calcutta. So people were marching to Calcutta, on the grounds that there would be more relief there.

Karan Thapar: It must've left a terrible impact on you.

Amartya Sen: It did, but you see, the puzzling thing was that I knew absolutely nobody who had the slightest difficulty in acquiring food. So the reality of class suddenly made a big appearance for me.

Karan Thapar: And at nine or ten you sensed that.

Amartya Sen: Yes, because I remember asking my grandfather—who was a Sanskritist and very keen on chatting about these things—I said, you know, 'How come I don't know anyone? Where are these people coming from?' He was quite aware of my interest by then in this class issue. And then of course when I studied famine later on, it became clear that it's a characteristic of virtually all famines. There are very few famines which affect more than five per cent of the population. It's almost never more than ten, and they all come from one occupation group or another which happen to be hit, and in the case of the Bengal Famine, it was the rural labourers, primarily agricultural labourers, rural transport workers, rural skill suppliers and fishermen. And so it's that kind of category of people who get completely blighted. In some ways although I hadn't analysed it, I wasn't capable of that, I knew the questions I wanted to ask even then. Though I wanted to be either a Sanskritist or a physicist, not an economist, I did think that at some stage, if I had a little leisure, I'd like to work on that. And I did become an economist. But I didn't get on to it until much later, in the 1970s.

Karan Thapar: In fact, just a few years after the famine, when you were still very much in your teens there

was another dreadful event that you had to witness which brought home to you the horrors of communalism. You were in Dhaka when you actually saw a man called Quadir Miyan being stabbed in front of you.

Amartya Sen: That's right. Yes, that was also a devastating experience. This was the first murder that I had ever seen. Actually I haven't seen that many even later, but I saw some during the riots, of course. But this was the beginning of the riots and it was coming into the Dhaka city. The city was quite divided at that time. Ours was a primarily Hindu region, and this was a landless labourer who was coming into the area, a Muslim labourer looking for a little work. And he got stabbed by some Hindu thug just outside our house. And he came into the house; I was playing in the garden, and I had to hold him; he wanted water, I had to get him some water. I shouted until my father arrived. We took him to the hospital and he died there. But when we were chatting—he chatted with me before he died and given the fact that I was only ten or eleven—it was amazing how keen he was in speaking. And he was mainly saying that his wife had told him not to go because it was a dangerous thing but there was nothing to eat at home. And the other thing that suddenly became clear to me in that context is that how economic un-freedom generates un-freedom of other kinds because Quadir Miyan did not have a choice; to feed the family he felt he had to go and take this risk and he died.

Karan Thapar: Clearly in retrospect, these look like seminal events in your life. But at the time you were nine, ten or eleven, were you aware that these were going to be important landmarks and would feature prominently in your career thereafter?

Amartya Sen: Well, I don't know about career because I didn't think of that, but they featured prominently in my mind all the time. Yes, Quadir Miyan was a big event.

Karan Thapar: It troubled you?

Amartya Sen: Troubled me and the tough question I mentioned came in here too. I also knew some others who had been stabbed, Hindus and Muslims, and it became quite clear that while their religious identity varied, their class identity remained almost exactly the same. Once a riot happened, each community's thugs were trying to kill the maximum number on the other side. And the easiest people to kill were the poor, the guys who were in the slums, the guys who had to go out to work, rather than middle class people who if necessary will, you know, stay in the shell. So it was the exposed people who were in fact the victims; their class identity is almost identical, even though their communal identity is totally opposite, mainly Hindu and Muslim. Now that actually in a sense, added to the class issue that had come up in the famine context. It's not that I was thinking profoundly about that.

Karan Thapar: But the beginnings were starting.

Amartya Sen: Well it was agitating me; it was really more a sense of disquiet rather than a sense of understanding.

Karan Thapar: Professor Sen, let's take a break. I want to come back in Part II and talk about the career that was about to unfold and a little bit more about you and the personal tribulations you had to face up to. We'll be back in just a couple of moments. Stay with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is Amartya Sen. Over the last four decades you've held professorships

in Harvard, London School of Economics, Oxford, not to mention Delhi University and Jadavpur University. Academically, do you belong anywhere?

Amartya Sen: Oh, I feel I belong everywhere. I think the academic question is easy because the academic life extends everywhere; I mean the academic community is marvellously open. I think there's a question about where geographically is home, you know?

Karan Thapar: What do you consider home?

Amartya Sen: I consider all these my home, and I think the question is wrong, which is often asked. You didn't ask it, but I'm often asked that, mainly what is your real home? Well if I live in Trinity now, a lovely sixteenth-century building, that's home isn't it?

Karan Thapar: But you know the corollary of being at home all over the world is that you're rootless.

Amartya Sen: That is the mistake—now that you have fallen into it I'll tell you that. I don't believe that. I think it comes from many prejudices. It's like saying, what do you like, lunch or dinner? It seems to me that it's impossible for you to like both. And I think it perfectly possible. I feel very much at home in Trinity, I feel very at home in the home that I own in Boston. I feel very at home in Shantiniketan, where I still have a home.

Karan Thapar: The same eclecticism also then in a sense applies to the many disciplines that you've adopted. It's not only economics, but also philosophy, mathematics, ethics, not to mention a biding interest in Sanskrit and poetry.

Amartya Sen: That's very kind of you to mention. You know, when we were talking about this Nobel—things like the bike going there—the other two objects they took were these two books, Sanskrit books on mathematics,

namely Aryabhatta's *Aryabhattiya*, a fifth century book about, you know, astronomy and mathematics, and Bhaskara's *Lilavati*, written in the twelfth century. And I remember reading them and feeling thrilled. They started off my interest in maths and axiomatic reasoning.

Karan Thapar: But it gave you this range of interests you've always had. How would you then describe yourself? 'Economist' seems to be too small and slight.

Amartya Sen: Well, I don't think it is slight. And I think a proper economist might even wonder whether I am one, since I don't devote enough time exclusively to economics; which I don't, because I'm interested in philosophy and sociology, cultural studies and now even in Decision Theory and Mathematical Logic and so on. But since you put it in that context, of course, it's like having a home, one home, many homes, I would say many disciplines. Again, I don't see any great conflict in that. Given the fact that you have one life and many interests, I need to traverse the range from maths to Sanskrit.

Karan Thapar: You're determined to make the most of it?

Amartya Sen: Yes, and why not? If it ends up that one of them distracts me from doing something or the other, it's not because of this. For example in philosophy, my interest in philosophy is not about Philosophy of Economics. People often ask me that question. I've been concerned originally with Logic, then with Ethics, and then Epistemology. But not so much particularly with economics, but then on the other hand philosophy doesn't get into my way when I'm doing an economic problem.

Karan Thapar: There's something you've begun doing a lot of recently. You've articulated a very strong

conviction based vision of what you think India should be. You see it growing, I get the feeling, as an accommodating, liberal, pluralist country. Do you feel as a Nobel Laureate that you have almost a duty to propagate this vision?

Amartya Sen: I don't think as a Nobel Laureate I do, but as an Indian citizen I think I do. I think there's a big tradition of India, which I don't think we recognize adequately.

Karan Thapar: When you say we, do you mean we Indians?

Amartya Sen: We Indians, yes. Ashoka, when he was talking about tolerance, so clearly articulated the fact that you could disagree and still respect each other and have a right to speak, and the state has the duty to protect that.

Karan Thapar: Do you think that as a state today, and the society you see in India, is moving away from that Ashokan ideal?

Amartya Sen: Well, I think so. Of course, the approximate beginning of that comes from Akbar. And in fact there is more of a connection, a legal connection, with the world of Akbar four hundred years ago and the world today. I think we have tended to move away. When Akbar in the 1590s was making a statement about religious tolerance and the need for it, this was the time when inquisitions were going on in Europe. Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake for heresy in 1600. I think we have an exceptionally great tradition and when people say, 'Democracy came from the West,' well, Democracy had many parts, which had many votes, but also, open public discussion, tolerance. I think we have as long a tradition on open public discussion and tolerance as the US.

Karan Thapar: Is there a sense in which today you're pushing India in a particular direction, perhaps subtly, by reminding India of its past, which it may have forgotten?

Amartya Sen: To some extent. I think that is a tradition of which we have every reason to be proud and it does seem to me that when many of the political activists express great pride in Indian history they don't seem to know exactly what it is that they have a good reason to be proud of.

Karan Thapar: Professor Sen, I hope there are many who listen to you and take heed of those words. Thank you very much for coming on this program.

Amartya Sen: Thank you very much indeed.

This interview was telecast on 6 March 2002.

Amartya Sen's thoughts on the argumentative tradition in Indian culture were recently published in the book The Argumentative Indian.

{4}

Amitav Ghosh

His books are not just a delight to read, but they're also a challenge. And his essays explore subtle truths with gentle wit. But what is he himself like? That's what I hope to reveal as I introduce you today to Amitav Ghosh.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Amitav.

Amitav Ghosh: Thank you Karan, it's a great pleasure to be here.

Karan Thapar: Now, your friends say that if there's one thing Amitav Ghosh always wanted to do, it was to write. Are they correct?

Amitav Ghosh: Yes, absolutely. Since I was about seven or eight I somehow knew that I would make my living by writing. Writing what, I didn't know. At that point, it could've been soap operas or anything. But yes, I certainly knew that.

Karan Thapar: In your essay to Mrs Gandhi, you write of Naipaul, 'It was he who first made it possible for me to think of myself as a writer.' How exactly did he influence you?

Amitav Ghosh: He had a very profound influence on me. In the '70s, when I was coming of age, there weren't then the plethora of Indian books in school and college that you have now. Today you could fill an entire bookshelf with books written by Indians in English, and

they are all excellent books. But in those days there were very few names. And for me Naipaul sparked an incredibly powerful engagement. Which is not to say that I agree with Naipaul; I can't imagine that I agree with even half of anything he says. But, there was an integrity to his project, an integrity to the sort of questions he was asking. He shook me up. And then you think that this is another way of writing. Here is someone who is an Indian talking about these things, with whom I have some sort of a connection. And he's made a way for himself in the world.

Karan Thapar: So in a sense, he gave you the confidence as well as the courage to believe that there was a case for an Indian voice in English literature?

Amitav Ghosh: It's exactly that. In those days, as an Indian writing in English you felt really like a fish out of water a lot of the time. It was very hard to know where you could function. And Naipaul really made it possible to see that this could be something you could do with seriousness.

Karan Thapar: Now, I'm told that when you came to write your first book, for certain reasons you did it in a hot, sweaty barsati in Defence Colony. In a sense, was that the Indian equivalent of an artist's garret?

Amitav Ghosh: As I was sitting there sweating in the barsati in Defence Colony, I used to think that some day someone's going to ask me that. I used to call it my garret. It was six feet by six feet. It was right on top, and you know what it's like in Delhi summers, it was like an oven. And I used to sit there in my lungi, just typing away, hour after hour. It was an extraordinary experience. I look back upon it with great affection.

Karan Thapar: But was it in fact quite difficult? You're able to romanticize it today. But at the time, did it require a lot of dedication and lot of determination to continue?

Amitav Ghosh: It did. It was incredibly difficult. Apart from everything else, at that point, you're in the mid to late-twenties. All your friends have jobs, they're earning money, and you're sitting there in a tiny little room, which was actually a servants' quarter, it wasn't even a barsati ...

Karan Thapar: And on a salary of just six hundred rupees a month?

Amitav Ghosh: That was later. In fact earlier it was three hundred. So, with almost no money, just struggling away with this thing, and you don't even know if anyone's even going to be interested in it—it was difficult, to say the least.

Karan Thapar: How close did you come to actually giving it all up and saying, 'Maybe I should do something else'?

Amitav Ghosh: I remember, I finished the first draft of my first book, *The Circle of Reason*—it took me a year to write it. I was living in Trivandrum. I finished it and then I started re-reading it. By the time I read ten pages, I knew that it was awful. So I took all this work, three hundred pages, and I just threw it away.

Karan Thapar: And began all over again?

Amitav Ghosh: And began all over again. And then I said to myself, 'Look, another year maybe. But if something doesn't come out of this, you've got to rethink this.'

Karan Thapar: So there was a point of desperation, which you felt?

Amitav Ghosh: Absolute desperation. Absolute. And I think that kind of desperation, that sense of your life depending on it, is important when you're writing a book.

Either this book will kill you, or you'll be able to write the book—that's what puts life into a book. And that's what happens to me to this day. In the last frame of the book, I feel I'm in a mortal struggle.

Karan Thapar: It continues through everything you've written?

Amitav Ghosh: Absolutely everything. The essays are a lot easier, but certainly with the fiction, bringing a book to its end is a mortal combat.

Karan Thapar: But today, when you are one of the best-established authors writing in the English language, and you look back on those days and see how far you've come, do you have a small glow of satisfaction, a sense of fulfilment?

Amitav Ghosh: I have a sense of wonder when I look back.

Karan Thapar: And you genuinely can't believe you've come so far?

Amitav Ghosh: Yes, absolutely. It's not like making a movie or something, where you have hundreds of people, millions of dollars and so on. Writing is one person alone in a small room with a piece of paper. And that doesn't change. And to think that, *that* then goes out in the world and sends out these ripples. In a sense it's something completely miraculous. And to this day I feel amazed by my life, I feel amazed by what happens to me.

Karan Thapar: You think it's a dream that will burst one day and you'll discover that it was all not really true?

Amitav Ghosh: That's a nightmare I do have sometimes, yes.

Karan Thapar: Okay, let's go back to the very beginning. You didn't grow up in India. You grew up in

countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Iran. What sort of childhood did you have?

Amitav Ghosh: It was very unsettled. It was also very ironic, you know, because my family is historically from Bangladesh. So, we were going back there, but we were not really from the place. We even spoke the dialect of Dhaka. And yet, we were foreigners. So it was a very strange feeling. But I think in the long run, it was perhaps Sri Lanka that really left a profound mark on me. I went to school there, a wonderful school called Royal College. I started school there when I was nine. Sri Lanka is the only part of the Indian subcontinent which actually uses an indigenous English demotic, completely indigenized English. And it was a language I got into speaking. And now, the funny thing is, when I read novels written by Sri Lankans in this language ...

Karan Thapar: It takes you all the way back?

Amitav Ghosh: It takes me so powerfully back. Recently I've been reading this author called Carl Muller, you know, who's a Sri Lankan, and I just found myself so moved and so haunted, and this whole language came just flooding back to me.

Karan Thapar: Today you're talking about reading. I gather in fact you began reading virtually when you entered your teens. This was serious stuff that you began reading then—a novel?

Amitav Ghosh: Oh, I started reading very seriously long before my teens. I was always a very avid reader. And I think that's partly to do with my childhood since we were always being moved. So, you grow to distrust your outside world a little bit.

Karan Thapar: You created your own world with the books you read?

Amitav Ghosh: That's right.

Karan Thapar: There's a wonderful story that you read—Sherlock Holmes—right through till dawn when you were twelve. Is it true?

Amitav Ghosh: Yes, my uncle gave it to me. He was an old-fashioned Calcutta intellectual and he said, 'You have to read Sherlock Holmes.' And I opened it and went plodding all the way through. Since then, it's extraordinary, I've met writers in so many places, and asked that, 'Which was the great book that started you off?' And they all say, *And Quiet Flows the Dawn.*

Karan Thapar: Your friends say that it was really at University in Delhi that you grew up and you were forever arguing with people and did it with enormous gusto and passion?

Amitav Ghosh: I do, in fact I look back on my life in university as a long series of arguments with a lot of people. I think if you believe in things, or if ideas are important to you, if what you're doing is important to you, you feel passionately committed to it, and if someone disagrees with you, you want to persuade them that they're wrong, or that you're right, or you that you have reasons for doing what you're doing and you have reasons for believing what you believe. And I'm like that to this day.

Karan Thapar: They also said that you used to hate leaving an argument unfinished.

Amitav Ghosh: I think that's true also.

Karan Thapar: And then they laugh and say there's completely another side to him too. He loved drinking and he used to love dancing.

Amitav Ghosh: When I started off my career as a writer, I felt in order to be a writer you had to be a

bohemian. And I certainly got into that kind of bohemian life, such as was available to us, with great gusto. Yes, I certainly did enjoy that. I think I would say I take an interest in life, in the exuberance of life and that sustained me.

Karan Thapar: You've done a lot of different things, and you seem to have done them almost deliberately. A few years after this when you were at Oxford doing your D.Phil. in Social Anthropology, you spent several months in an Egyptian village. What was that like?

Amitav Ghosh: It was actually more like a year, and it was extraordinary, because there I was, twenty-one or twenty-two, going off into this tiny village where there was no electricity. I was living in mud huts with straw, overrun with fleas, and I was sharing my room with some eight or nine chickens. So, it was just a complete shock; suddenly I'm at a place where nobody speaks anything but Arabic. I'd started learning Arabic, but my Arabic was still rather halting. So, it was really like you've been taken off the land and put in outer space for a while and for the first time I realized what it meant to be in a completely silent world, where you don't understand a word of what anyone is saying to you. At night, I remember, I had a little transistor radio, and I used to go through it, tuning in different channels. Every time it came to a familiar language, I would just listen. And it was like having a bath, the words would flow over me. It was extraordinary really.

Karan Thapar: So you lived your life with a radio as a sort of companion rather than anyone else?

Amitav Ghosh: No. Soon I became completely fluent in Arabic and I made a lot of friends. It was completely wonderful, it was a magical experience, really.

Karan Thapar: In your essays you write of an engaging character who became a friend of yours and you seemed to have called him 'Hameez the rat'. And he was always bemused by the fact that you came from a society where they burnt their dead.

Amitav Ghosh: Yes. You see, they'd never seen an Indian before, and they only had some sort of stereotypical notions. So, with Hameez, for example, I remember once we were out walking, and we were walking past a cow. He said, 'Stop! Stop!' And he went off, letting me stand there as he got a mat and put it down. I said, 'What do you want me to do?' He said, 'Well, aren't you going to lie down and worship the cow?' I said, 'No, I've never done that.'

Karan Thapar: Today when you look back on those years, training and then doing your D.Phil. as a Social Anthropologist, how important are they to the career that you eventually pursued as a writer?

Amitav Ghosh: They've been very important. For me being in Egypt was really my equivalent of being in writing school. I kept a copy of notes in a diary and it really put me through the whole process of observation, which is so much a part of a novelist's craft. And I was very lucky. While I was living there I read Marquez—*One Hundred Years of Solitude*. And it was extraordinary because I did live a hundred years of solitude. And I read Boswell, *The Life of Johnson*; it's really a book about conversation. And that really helped me very much because I began to make very detailed notes of my conversations and that eventually became a book in its own right.

Karan Thapar: Amitav, let's take a break, I want to come back in Part II and talk a little bit about the work

you've done. And perhaps a little bit more about you. We'll be back in a moment's time. See you then.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is one of India's most highly regarded writers, Amitav Ghosh. Amitav, let's talk about your work. After reading *The Glass Palace* and *At Large in Burma*, I get the feeling you have a special relationship with that country. Am I wrong?

Amitav Ghosh: You're not wrong at all. I have a very powerful relationship with Burma. And it started curiously, because my family, like many Bengali families—and especially big families from Bengal, Tamil Nadu and so on—did have a historic connection with Burma. I had relatives who went off to settle there in the late nineteenth century. Especially I had one uncle who became a refugee after the war and he was living in Calcutta. And he told me these wonderful stories about Burma. So I grew up in the way some North Indians grow up with stories about the North-West Frontier or something. I grew up with stories of Burma in my head.

Karan Thapar: But it's not just historical Burma that you've been close to. You've also spent time, as you've mentioned in your essays, with people undercover in Burma. Now, it sounds like a romantic thing to do ... but in fact was it, Amitav?

Amitav Ghosh: At the time it just seemed very dangerous. But in some sense it *is* romantic. Romantic is perhaps a bad word to use for people whose lives were completely devastated. And I'm talking now about the young idealists, the students who had to leave Burma in

1988, and who since then have really been just eking out a living along the Burma border. And these are young men and women of incredible idealism and dedication, whose lives have just been devastated by what happened in Burma. So it was very, very painful to even be with them because their lives were so difficult.

Karan Thapar: You sympathize very closely with their cause. In fact I get the clear impression from your writing that not only do you admire Aung San Suu Kyi, but she's one of your chosen special heroes.

Amitav Ghosh: I think that's probably true. I really admire Aung San Suu Kyi very, very much. And you know, I feel it's because I think she has something which no other political leader of that time had, which is that she understands the virtue of patience. Patience is the most elusive virtue in the world and she understands what it is, that things take time. And for this alone I respect her hugely. I've spent time in places like Cambodia and so on where the UN comes in and decides, 'We're going to reinvent everything overnight.' And it doesn't work like that. Life is long, it takes time. Things take time. And she understands that and I really admire her for that.

Karan Thapar: In your book *The Glass Palace*, Dino, one of the more engaging characters, says of Aung San Suu Kyi, 'She's the only one who seems to understand what the place of politics is, that it cannot be allowed to cannibalize all of life.' Is that, for you, the essence of her character?

Amitav Ghosh: That came straight from the heart. Yes, I feel the more I've been around the world—and I've done a fair amount of political reporting in different places—in some ways, especially for me as a writer but for every

human being who's trying to lead a self-conscious life, a self-aware life, it's become very important that we recognize how important politics is. But also we must learn to keep a domain which is sovereign for our inner space, for our inner life. I feel that we've reached a point where our inner lives are being invaded by politics in such a dangerous way that we have to fight this battle. And I think that is one of the wonderful things about Aung San Suu Kyi, that she recognizes it. She recognizes that for the sake of politics, she's not going to do everything possible. She's not going to call out a march that's going to result in hundreds of thousands of people dead. And for that again I do honour her.

Karan Thapar: In a sense, that's a parallel you could make with contemporary India, couldn't you, that we seem to attach politics to everything? We politicize everything and perhaps we over-emphasize the importance of politics itself.

Amitav Ghosh: I certainly am of that view. I think that there's an over-politicization of our society where politics has been everything, be it sports or films. And of course, one of the reasons for that is simply that until say the '90s, the government and the political spheres actually had control of everything. But I think one of the really encouraging things that's happened in the last ten or fifteen years is that other sectors of life have evolved and emerged and have become increasingly strong and powerful—say the whole voluntary group, the NGOs, the community based organizations, as well as the private sector economy. So no longer is it only politics that runs our society. There are other areas which—

Karan Thapar: Are recovering the lost ground from politics?

Amitav Ghosh: That's exactly right. And I think that's one of the great hopeful sides in India, to me.

Karan Thapar: Amitav, let's talk a little about yourself. Your friends say that, 'He has always been intensely ambitious, very conscious of a destiny that he was born to.' Are you a driven person, Amitav?

Amitav Ghosh: I think it's hard for anyone to answer that about themselves; I would certainly say that I've always been ambitious in my work and that's what really matters to me. When I think of a novel, when I think of a project that I'm going to work on, it doesn't interest me unless it's taking on a lot intellectually, a lot in narrative terms, a lot in terms of history. So my projects are enormously ambitious, I think that's certainly true. But, the sort of ambitions that people have in the world, of a big house or whatever, those are not my ambitions.

Karan Thapar: You've killed those ambitions for something you can share with everyone?

Amitav Ghosh: No, those are not my ambitions at all.

Karan Thapar: Your friends also point to certain paradoxes. They say that, 'He makes friends very easily, but he fights with them just as easily too.'

Amitav Ghosh: Well, anyone who has friends must understand that.

Karan Thapar: You will fight.

Amitav Ghosh: Yes, and it's always like that in any close relationship. I think when you fight with friends it's because you care about your friends. I've been very lucky in many, many ways. And one of the ways in which I've been very lucky is that I've found a sort of community of people here in India, in Delhi, in Calcutta, in many places, who are interested in very similar things. And a lot of the

work that we've done, and many of the people I know have done incredibly interesting, creative work. But a lot of the things we've done have come out of a collective engagement with each other. And often there are disagreements, and I think that's a good thing.

Karan Thapar: And disagreements are the essence of a relationship just as much as agreement.

Amitav Ghosh: I couldn't agree more.

Karan Thapar: In 1990 you got married to Deborah Baker. How did you meet her?

Amitav Ghosh: It was just chance. I happened to be on a visiting professorship in Virginia in the United States. She works in publishing and she was visiting and we met.

Karan Thapar: Love at first sight?

Amitav Ghosh: Well, let me just say that a year and a half later we were married.

Karan Thapar: They say of you that, 'He's a much calmer, more confident person. In a sense his spirit has been slightly rested after meeting Deborah.' Has she had a good influence on you?

Amitav Ghosh: I think so, absolutely; certainly I would say that my wife and even my children have really been such an area of fulfilment for me. And not just that, I think one thing I have recognized as a writer is that my involvement with my family, with my children gives me the strength to write. It gives me something to write about, it gives me material. Now when I write books I find more and more children in them. And when you have children everything you do is for them.

Karan Thapar: You've achieved an enormous amount very quickly and you're only forty-six. How long do you think writing will continue to fulfil you or do you think that you're going to look for other challenges?

Amitav Ghosh: It really frightens me when people ask me that because it's like all my work is still ahead of me. And I think that I'm just getting started. I have so many books ahead of me; I just feel that my life as a writer is just beginning. Unlike other people who may write a book and then do something else or some other thing, I've only ever wanted to write. That's all I know to do. That's all that interests me. That's all I want to do. So if I weren't writing, I wouldn't be alive.

Karan Thapar: Not politics at any point in time? You write about politics, you've been a journalist briefly earlier. Will politics ever interest you?

Amitav Ghosh: One thing I can say absolutely categorically is that I would never be in politics.

Karan Thapar: And yet there would be a political content to what you say and do because so much of your comment is on politics, the moral side of politics.

Amitav Ghosh: I think there's often a misconception. As a writer I think we do comment on collective ethic, and that's different from politics. And I think ethics interest me, collective ethics, the ethical life of a people, of course that's of interest to me. But politics in the sense of elections and winning elections and that kind of thing doesn't interest me in the least.

Karan Thapar: Amitav Ghosh, it was a pleasure getting to know you.

Amitav Ghosh: Wonderful to meet you, Karan.

Karan Thapar: Thank you.

Amitav Ghosh: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 21 August 2002.

Anitav Ghosh's most recent novel The Hungry Tide *was published in 2004.*

{5}

Arundhati Roy

She is one of India's best known authors and yet we know very little about her. Millions have read her essays on the Narmada and the bomb; yet few have understood what these subjects really mean to her. So what is the reality behind this enigma? What sort of a personality lies behind the author? Let's see if we can catch a glimpse of it as we meet Arundhati Roy.

Karan Thapar: Arundhati, your writings don't convey a single clear idea about their author. Instead what one hears is a series of complex, sometimes even contradictory, images. Would you agree with that?

Arundhati Roy: No, I don't think so. I know that there is a difference between fiction and non-fiction which may be perceived by some as being schizophrenic or a different personality writing. But that isn't the case; it's just a different means of really talking about a philosophy.

Karan Thapar: Let me see if I can understand that philosophy. In *The God of Small Things* one has the impression of the author as someone who takes an almost child-like wonder and delight in the lesser things of creation.

Arundhati Roy: I wouldn't always say that about *The God of Small Things*. It isn't just about small things. It's about how this very smallest thing connects to the very biggest.

Karan Thapar: In fact it makes that connection between life as well, from the small to the big lies the truth of existence.

Arundhati Roy: Yes, from the dent that the spider makes when its eggs hatch on the water and watching it to what they feel as unprotected children in this very closed, parochial community, to how history intrudes into their lives.

Karan Thapar: Okay, that's complete in itself. Then on the other side you have your activist writings, your essays on the bomb, your essays on the Narmada, and there the image is of a woman struggling against the world. At times almost a lone voice in the wilderness.

Arundhati Roy: Well, it isn't a lone voice. I think the saddest thing about this is that in the nuclear essay as well as the Narmada one, I'm taking up issues that are not new. I'm only restating them. And that I think is something that has to be done constantly.

Karan Thapar: But you are doing it in the face of public contention. You are doing in against the grain of wisdom.

Arundhati Roy: I don't know about that. I think what we have begun to define as public is a very small and privileged public. But you take the case of the Narmada valley—one is really trying to make the connection between this very well-informed or supposedly well-informed public and a world that is slowly being cut off.

Karan Thapar: Okay, I want to talk first about the person making this connection, and then let's talk about the subject they connect with. Let's go back to the beginning. You were born, or you were at least christened, I believe, Susanna Arundhati Roy. When and why did you stop using Susanna?

Arundhati Roy: I just don't like Susanna. I guess it's just something that sits uneasily on me.

Karan Thapar: How old were you when you made this decision?

Arundhati Roy: How old was I? I think even when I was in college people used to call me Susie. A lot of people did but I started using Arundhati.

Karan Thapar: So are you still Susie to old friends?

Arundhati Roy: I have so many names, that if somebody calls me Rakesh or Suresh or something, I'd probably not wince.

Karan Thapar: You don't really mind what you are called, but you'd rather not be called Susie or Susanna?

Arundhati Roy: I'm called that. But I'm called Roy by a lot of close friends. I'm called Noonie and many other names.

Karan Thapar: You wrote somewhere that you childhood was spent catching fish and learning to be quiet. Now that sounds wonderfully idyllic but what does it mean?

Arundhati Roy: I spent the earliest years in the village in which *The God of Small Things* is set, on the banks of a river. I had an unsupervised childhood. We were, my brother and I, five and four respectively, when we came to this village. And we spent our time fishing in the river; normally, protected children at that age would not be allowed be do that. And so, being four years old and sitting quietly and waiting for that fish to bite was magical. I remember things that I thought when I was four years old. I actually remember them.

Karan Thapar: What sort of memories do you keep with you today?

Arundhati Roy: The first thing that I ever wrote, the first coherent sentence that I ever wrote is in *The God of Small Things*. And I wrote it when I was around five.

Karan Thapar: What is the sentence?

Arundhati Roy: It was about an Australian missionary. Whenever my mother was around, she used to tell me that she could see Satan in my eyes, so I remember the first sentence was that 'I hate Miss Mitten, and I think her knickers are torn.'

Karan Thapar: You said your parents were divorced when you were four or five. Did you have a happy childhood?

Arundhati Roy: I had moments of happiness in my childhood, but I wouldn't describe it as a happy one. It was a very intense one. But I wouldn't call it happy.

Karan Thapar: Did you have a lot of love as a child?

Arundhati Roy: I think I had two things, which is why you're always unsettled. A lot of love, but also a lot of fear. A lot of uncertainty, a lot of not knowing what was going to happen to me tomorrow, which is very unsettling for a child.

Karan Thapar: And this was entirely because of the circumstances of marital discord in which you were growing up?

Arundhati Roy: No, I didn't grow up in marital discord, because my parents were divorced when I must've been two or something.

Karan Thapar: So where did the uncertainty enter?

Arundhati Roy: Just being in a closed traditional society, a child of a divorced mother—so your protector, the mother, is almost more vulnerable than you are. And all the prejudices of that society are being transmitted and radiated by her to you.

Karan Thapar: And as a child you always felt you have to protect your mother.

Arundhati Roy: It's not that I felt I had to protect her but you don't know what is going to come. You know, as it's said in the book, anything can happen to anyone. You had that sense of terrible fear and vulnerability in a world that you had no protection against.

Karan Thapar: And even today I can sense that you are not happy talking about it. It troubles you to talk about it

Arundhati Roy: I don't like to talk about my childhood.

Karan Thapar: It brings back those uncertainties, it brings back that fear?

Arundhati Roy: Yes, partly that and it's also partly because I don't just like to talk.

Karan Thapar: You're pushing it into the background. It's over and done with.

Arundhati Roy: Not just that, it's not important. It's not important for me to air my personal life.

Karan Thapar: Okay, you left home at the age of sixteen. Did you feel as if you were being driven away or were you striking out on your own?

Arundhati Roy: No. It wasn't either of those things. I just couldn't deal with what was happening to me at that time. So it was the easier option.

Karan Thapar: So you had to leave in order to save yourself?

Arundhati Roy: Yes.

Karan Thapar: You went and lived for a while in a squatters' colony in Delhi, among beggars, selling beer bottles to make a living. What was it like?

Arundhati Roy: I was living initially in Ferozeshah Kotla, within the walls of the old fort. It was a little

squatters' colony. I was okay. When you say it like that, it sounds tragic. But it wasn't. There was a group of us, all of us around sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, studying architecture.

Karan Thapar: Were you rebels, were you idealists running away from parents, was there a common connection?

Arundhati Roy: Well, I was without a family. The others weren't, they were still connected with their families. All of us were very interested in what we were doing in college, interested in politics. The whole beginning of *The God of Small Things*, the nuclear essay, the Narmada valley, it all started initially with architecture and about trying to understand what I was studying there.

Karan Thapar: So, in a sense, would it be correct to say that the idealism, the fire, the passion were born at this time?

Arundhati Roy: It's beyond that; it's also the humour, the feeling of being sixteen and seventeen years old, being a girl or a woman who has had an education, who is getting an education, and yet she doesn't have these protections and these safety nets. This world is an amazing university to learn in. So that's where it comes from, I think—experiencing the world without a safety net.

Karan Thapar: You wrote somewhere that you wanted to negotiate with the world on your own terms, not with the parents or the uncles or the aunts. Was that what you were doing at that age?

Arundhati Roy: That's was I was doing, yes.

Karan Thapar: And there was laughter in the midst of the uncertainty, because I'm sure it must've been pretty uncertain.

Arundhati Roy: It was. But when you're that young, it really doesn't matter. You don't have a sense of uncertainty, at least I don't remember for a minute thinking what will become of me.

Karan Thapar: You couldn't have cared less at that time, because the future was ahead.

Arundhati Roy: Yes. If it ever came to how am I going to pay my rent tomorrow, I'd just make a mural or I'd just design a letterhead for someone or I'd just work in an office at night.

Karan Thapar: Ok. So it was during these years, precarious but fun, that you met Pradip Krishen. I gather he saw you on a bicycle.

Arundhati Roy: I was working at the National Institute of Urban Affairs, but I was living on my own in a barsati in Nizamuddin, and I met Pradip.

Karan Thapar: You write somewhere that if you hadn't met him, you would never have lived fully. Is he the anchor in your life today?

Arundhati Roy: Yes. Well, he is ...I don't want to talk about what he means to me. He's great, he occupies all the intellectual spaces that I don't, so it's a nice scheme.

Karan Thapar: You're compatible.

Arundhati Roy: Yes. I'm floating around somewhere up and there and he's—

Karan Thapar: He's also given you the love, hasn't he, that perhaps as a child you never had, you wanted but didn't get.

Arundhati Roy: I have to say that a lot of people have done that for me. I am at this point of time a very loved person and I know that as well as the fact that I do love many people.

Karan Thapar: Okay. So, it was sometime after you met Pradip that you began writing. You wrote first for films, scripts for television, scripts for movies, and then slowly, perhaps even without intending it, you began to work on your book. How did it start?

Arundhati Roy: Well, it started of course when I met Pradeep, he was making *Massey Sahib*, his first film, and he just asked me to act in it, and acting wasn't what I really wanted to do—nor do I want to act now; but I'd get a ring-side seat into how a film is made. And I did *Massey Sahib*. And after I did it I realized that I wanted to write. It was never an accident, my writing, I knew ever since I was a child that this is what I want to do.

Karan Thapar: Ever since that sentence at the age of five?

Arundhati Roy: Yes. But I never thought I'd ever get there. When you are sixteen and seventeen with no source of income other what you earn on a precarious daily basis, it seemed like I'd never be able to be a writer even though I wanted to try that out. But it didn't pan out that way. So after *Massey Sahib* I used to write letters ...

Karan Thapar: To Pradip?

Arundhati Roy: And I knew that one day he was going to write to me and say that I've never read writing like this, and that's happened.

Karan Thapar: So he gave you the confidence?

Arundhati Roy: Yes. He was the person who opened the doors, who made it possible, made it seem like a viable option, rather than just a dream.

Karan Thapar: I'm going to take a break at this point, but I'd like to come back and talk about your writing and also a little about that magic moment when you won the Booker Prize. So I'll see you in a moment, don't go away.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back to *Face to Face India*, my guest is Arundhati Roy. Arundhati, we paused at the end of Part One at that very moment when you were going to win the Booker Prize. At that particular moment, when the announcement was happening, I gather you weren't even in the room. Is that right?

Arundhati Roy: Yes, that's right. I was out. I had gone to the loo and someone was banging on the door, 'They're announcing it, get out of there.'

Karan Thapar: What was it that took you away, were you nervous?

Arundhati Roy: No ... I was nervous but that's not what took me to the loo. Of course, I enjoyed that fact that I won the Booker Prize, but while it was happening there was something quite humiliating in the whole thing.

Karan Thapar: Being in competition?

Arundhati Roy: Being in competition. I wrote this book for myself and Pradip.and Amu and, suddenly, I didn't want to want that prize. But I had started to want it, because of the kind of pressures that are being put on you.

Karan Thapar: You were beginning to get a little angry with yourself as well suddenly.

Arundhati Roy: Yes, I was sad that I wanted to win it; I thought I was bigger than that.

Karan Thapar: Okay, tell me, today you are probably one of India's best-known authors, certainly the most widely read. What does your writing mean to you? Does it define you?

Arundhati Roy: Let's say that there is nothing that pleases me more than a beautiful sentence. I could go and come back carrying a sentence in my head, like people

carry their shopping. It is something that satisfies me because—I've said this before—that language is the skin on my thought, it's the way I think and it's a great privilege to be given that space to think.

Karan Thapar: The language and the thought is very clear and very obvious in *The God of Small Things*, but what about your activist writings? I take it that's not spontaneous, that doesn't just come into your head, that's researched and sweated over?

Arundhati Roy: Yes; but *The God of Small Things* wasn't spontaneous. It's a very carefully crafted novel, though the language is spontaneous.

Karan Thapar: But the structure is not?

Arundhati Roy: No, the structure is not. In *The End of Imagination*, it was a moral position, my moral position on the nuclear tests. In *The Greater Common Good*, instinct took me to the Narmada valley, but I was very aware that this is a subject one needs to learn about before one writes about it.

Karan Thapar: Let's talk about those two essays. In *The End of Imagination*, people say that her heart's in the right place, her motivations are pure, but she doesn't know what she's talking about.

Arundhati Roy: Yes. Well, how do you argue with a moral position? As far as I am concerned, I don't mind if every country in the world had a nuclear bomb, I'm not talking about defence strategy. So if you want to talk about it in those terms, you can say she doesn't know what she is talking about. But I am a unilateralist on that score. In the Narmada valley it's a different thing. You can't take a moral position on a big dam, and I don't, I didn't have a moral position. I was curious about it.

Karan Thapar: Let's push this a little. Let's go back to *The End of Imagination*, the essay on the bomb: people say that it was full of passion and emotion but lacking in analytical content, like candy floss it tantalized only to disappoint.

Arundhati Roy: I think that people are really scared of passion and emotion, it's something that they don't want to address. But I can't argue with such a general point, that somebody just dismisses you with 'oh it's full of emotion' as if there is something criminal about emotion.

Karan Thapar: And you were in fact deliberately making an emotional statement, that was the whole point about it.

Arundhati Roy: Of course, of course; I believe in emotion, I'm sad that people are so suspicious of emotion. And in a way I understand it: when you live in this country, you have to deaden your emotions to carry on living, to carry on dealing with what you see on the streets.

Karan Thapar: Okay, let's switch to the other essay, because, there it wasn't emotions that people criticized. There it was the fact that you have taken your critique too far and lost credibility. For instance you write that 'people stop growing things that they can afford to eat and start growing things that they can only afford to sell'. 'By linking themselves to the market they lose control over their lives,' and later on you say, 'they get yoked to the whims of a world they know nothing about.' It sounds as if you are glorifying a concept of the noble savage?

Arundhati Roy: Yes.

Karan Thapar: That you are worshipping an arcadian ignorance, without accepting or admitting that it is backward, it's poor, it's impoverished, it's self-denying.

Arundhati Roy: Let me say this: when I went to the valley, I had no doubt in my mind—and nobody should have any doubt—that these are very poor people that are being displaced. But this idea of this noble savage, particularly this term, is offensive to me. It's the sort of government-lies, that they're actually trying to say that we are displacing people for their own good, and taking them away for their own good. This is insulting.

Karan Thapar: It's the big brother syndrome. We know better for them than they know for themselves.

Arundhati Roy: Yes, here you're talking about these villages Jalsindhi and Neengavan—you must go there and see; these are poor people but they are self-sufficient.

Karan Thapar: Ah! So just see your argument on this—

Arundhati Roy: Let me finish. And when you take them away from that and dump them, smash their community links, they have no land, you give them some money and you call this development? If they were so interested in development, in developing these people, why for the last fifty years was there not a single road, not a single school, not a single well?

Karan Thapar: You see, that's a very valid point that many would accept but you go further and that's where the danger comes, you go on to argue that dams are a threat to democracy, and that's the point at which people say, 'she's exaggerating'.

Arundhati Roy: Okay, I'll tell you what I meant by that. We have 3,600 big dams in India; we're the third biggest dam builders. And I don't say that they are threats to democracy, but what I say is that these dams have taken natural resources away from the countryside to the cities. So yes, they have produced electricity, but 80

per cent of rural houses have no electricity, 250 million have no drinking water.

Karan Thapar: Do you think you've overstated yourself, used language that has misled people?

Arundhati Roy: No. I stand by every single thing I've said in it. And I only want to say that—it's the saddest point about this debate—there comes a point when arguments stop and untruths begin to filter in.

Karan Thapar: Your critics were hitting you back with untruths, you're saying?

Arundhati Roy: Yes, with untruths.

Karan Thapar: Is there not a danger here that the response to Arundhati the activist could begin to affect the respect, perhaps even the admiration for Arundhati the author? Does it ever worry you?

Arundhati Roy: It doesn't worry me, because this not about Arundhati, this is not about me at all. I'm not playing for brownie points here.

Karan Thapar: You're part of a bigger person.

Arundhati Roy: I'm not interested in character certificates from people telling me what I should write and what I shouldn't, who respects me, who doesn't; I've got the t-shirt, I've got everything that I could've possibly wanted.

Karan Thapar: You're saying this is me, accept me as I am. I'm not going to change to please you?

Arundhati Roy: Or you don't; it's not about my soliciting any kind of public support for myself. I am somebody who wants to say what I want to say. I'm willing to have people argue with me, but not try and give me marks about my opinions.

Karan Thapar: Arundhati, may you be able to say what you want to say and say it well, as you do. Thanks for coming to the studio.

Arundhati Roy: Bye.

This interview was telecast on 7 July 1999.
Arundhati Roy's non-fiction writings have since been collected in two volumes, The Algebra of Infinite Justice *and* An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire.

{6}

Dev Anand

Quite simply there isn't anyone like him. For sixty years he has dominated the Indian film industry and all that while they have held him in affection and in awe. So how did it all start, more importantly what is he like? Well, today is your chance to find out, as I introduce you to the one and only legendary Dev Anand.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Dev.

Dev Anand: Thank you.

Karan Thapar: Are you in the process of finishing your latest film *Love at Times Square*?

Dev Anand: I have just finished dubbing and I am starting to do the background music and the mixing in the first week of October, and it is heading for release in December.

Karan Thapar: So December this year the movie will be available?

Dev Anand: I started the film on 31 December 2000 at Times Square in New York. That was the dawn of the twenty-first century. And I was there for seven hours filming that event. Then I went in 2002 for the ending of the film, again stood there for seven hours after the New York devastation. And the span of story is one year: 2001-2002. And in 2003 you can see it.

Karan Thapar: But the amazing thing is, you are seventy-nine years old, what keeps you going?

Dev Anand: I shall be seventy-nine on 26 September 2002. What keeps me going is, I think now my motion pictures, because I make my own stories, I write my own scripts, I get hold of ideas, I start developing those ideas, I do the screenplays, I go behind the cameras, I face the cameras, I introduce newcomers, I cast big stars, I am sitting with the music directors, I am in the editing room, and by the time I finish a film I am on the next one—and that's total involvement and involvement is excitement and excitement is all you need in life to keep you young.

Karan Thapar: They call you the Peter Pan of the Indian film industry!

Dev Anand: Whatever they call me, I don't care. But I think I am what I am.

Karan Thapar: They say you are the boy who never stopped dreaming, and whose dreams have always come true.

Dev Anand: I think one should never stop dreaming. The day you stop dreaming you cease to be. And dreams never end. If you fulfil one dream it leads on to another and to another and to another. And it's beautiful to keep on dreaming. All my films are dreams; they turn into reality as soon as the movie is over.

Karan Thapar: So would you say the secret of Dev Anand is that he dreams and that he makes those dreams a reality?

Dev Anand: That's a fact.

Karan Thapar: Your life has been one big beautiful dream.

Dev Anand: I weave stories out of dreams, out of realities, out of situations, out of newspaper cuttings, out of personalities, out of incidents and then I make them believable for the audience and that's a dream by itself.

Karan Thapar: Now let us go back to the very beginning of the dream that has been your life. The world today knows you as Dev Anand, but that's not the actual name your parents originally gave you. Was it?

Dev Anand: My name as my parents called me was Dharam Dev. Dev Dutt is wrong, as it is on the Internet. My real name given to me by my parents was Dharam Dev. I took off Dharam because Dharam is a big problem in the world. So I just kept Dev, it is sweet and nice. And Anand is my surname, so I am Dev Anand.

Karan Thapar: You had five sisters and two brothers—was it a happy childhood?

Dev Anand: One family—one big family—so we were all happy, but then I have lost two brothers, I have lost two sisters as well, and well, life goes on. It was a upper-middle class family in Gurdaspur, my father was a lawyer and I was a middle-class little boy, roaming the streets, playing gilli danda, marbles, cricket, hockey, then going to school and then going to Dalhousie during the summer; my father used to take me to an English convent and then I went to college and I wanted to go to Lahore Government College and my father's situation, the financial situation was not very right. He said why go to that college, it is very expensive. I said, 'No, I must go to that college'; and my mother was very seriously ill, she was dying and at that moment I was very close to my mother and she held my hand and she gave that hand to my father and she said this boy of mine has looked after me and I am dying; just take care of him and send him to Lahore Government College.

Karan Thapar: And you went?

Dev Anand: I went there and I did my graduation there and I wanted to go for my MA in Literature, but my father

said no, no further money for an MA. But do a job in a bank.

Karan Thapar: That's when in fact you went to Bombay?

Dev Anand: So I broke all my ties with Gurdaspur and Lahore and I picked up my bag and left; and I keep on repeating that because it's a very important part of my biography. I had thirty rupees in my pocket and a small little bag and the Frontier Mail left Lahore and dropped me at Bombay Central. Tall, huge buildings and all of a sudden, I was a tramp.

Karan Thapar: So there you were, a little boy from Gurdaspur in a big city, all on your own.

Dev Anand: And that probably was the best period—two and a half years of struggle. I call it very romantic because that made me what I am.

Karan Thapar: So struggle has been good for you?

Dev Anand: I think so. I think it is very important.

Karan Thapar: What did you do? You were a military census officer?

Dev Anand: For a little while—because I had to make some money—I had to make both ends meet.

Karan Thapar: So you used to check the letters?

Dev Anand: From the military people—military census. It was 1945, the war ended in 1945 and I was under some British soldiers, colonels and majors and there were census letters from military people, from officers back home to their families.

Karan Thapar: You know there is a lovely story about how you got your first job. They say that you got a job with Prabhat Studios because you just barged into Babubhai Mistry's office?

Dev Anand: I literally gate crashed; it was raining, I put on my overcoat and got into the local train and I went straight to his office. He was not there; the chowkidar asked me what are you doing here and I said I got to meet the big saab. He said, 'He is not there.' I said, 'I shall wait.' He said, 'You can't wait,' but I said, 'I shall wait.' And it so happened that the big saab was passing by, going to his office; he stopped for a while, looked at me for a few seconds, went inside, called the chowkidar and said, 'Who is this boy sitting outside?' 'He says he wants to meet you.' He said, 'Get him in.' So I went and sat for ten minutes, he kept looking at me, laughing to himself and said, 'I believe you have been waiting for me, young man.' I said, 'I wanted to present myself.' He laughed and then laughed and asked, 'Are you free day after tomorrow?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Why don't you come day after tomorrow and meet my director?' I said, 'I'd love to.' So I went there two days later and I met their director and that happened to be P.L. Santoshi, Rajkumar Santoshi's father.

Karan Thapar: And he took you for *Hum Ek Hain*?

Dev Anand: And he said, 'Can you come to Pune for an audition?' I said, 'Yes.' So they gave me a first class ticket by Deccan Queen to go to Pune; a first class ticket to Pune those days was fantastic for me and I went to Pune, gave my test, came back and fell ill for seven days with excitement.

Karan Thapar: And then?

Dev Anand: And then I got a break for Rs 400 a month.

Karan Thapar: Which was a fortune?

Dev Anand: Which was great money those days. Rs 400 a month. They would take Rs 35 for tax and then I

was a lord, lord and master of my destiny, roaming the street of Pune and then I never looked back.

Karan Thapar: But you know when you were making that movie—when P.L. Santoshi cast you for *Hum Ek Hain*—it wasn't memorable so much for the movie as a friendship that you formed during the making of the film?

Dev Anand: Guru Dutt. Guru Dutt was an assistant director to Vishram Bhedekar, a dance director. He had just come from Uday's Shankar's academy, the cultural academy at Almorah and he and I became great friends. Great friends, pals.

Karan Thapar: And you made a promise to each other, didn't you?

Dev Anand: Yes, we did, I said, 'If I hit big time and I become a producer you will come and direct my picture.' And he said, 'If I ever become a director you will be my star.'

Karan Thapar: And you in fact fulfilled that promise.

Dev Anand: His career took off with *Baazi*, it was directed by him. It was a Navketan picture. We started Navketan in 1949. 1949 to 2002, this is my company all this long. We made so many pictures.

Karan Thapar: But you did only one picture with Guru Dutt as director. Do you regret that?

Dev Anand: No, I made another picture for him—*CID*. Directed by Raj Khosla, he was again his assistant. Again a Navketan boy, but he produced it. So every time he wanted to make a picture he invited me do to a picture. But it never clicked.

Karan Thapar: With *Ziddi* first and then with *Baazi*?

Dev Anand: *Ziddi* was Bombay Talkies.

Karan Thapar: The young boy who came from Gurdaspur seeking his fortune suddenly overnight in his

early twenties and mid-twenties got catapulted into stardom. What did stardom feel like?

Dev Anand: Today I am taking it for granted, I am more down to earth, I have certain habits.

Karan Thapar: But in '48 and '49 when stars were in your eyes?

Dev Anand: I think I got recognized in *Ziddi* and I became a star in *Baazi*. And after *Baazi* I never looked back. And the high watermark came with *Guide*, which was in collaboration. We did it in two versions, one in English from R.K Narayan's novel which we sent to America and one in Hindi which I made.

Karan Thapar: Just when would you say the culmination came—with *Guide*? Almost everyone, when they talk about Dev Anand and his amazing career, always stop and say *Guide* was special. Was it special for you as well?

Dev Anand: Very special for various reasons. Number one it exposed me to Hollywood, number two it instilled in me a feeling that enough of stardom, movie-making is in the hands of a director, it is a director's medium, go on boy make your own films. And I knew I could write, I could direct. I had learnt the mechanics of making a film and it is risky and you spend money to make a picture.

Karan Thapar: But this is fascinating, on the sets of *Guide* the director Dev Anand was born.

Dev Anand: And I started writing my script called *Prem Pujari* after that. During the 1965 conflict.

Karan Thapar: So in fact it wasn't just the challenge of being a director, it was your desire to completely master the medium?

Dev Anand: You don't ultimately master it completely. No, you can't master anything all the time. You keep on

learning more and more. You are in the constant process of learning. And the moment you feel you are the master, you are finished. Nobody is ever a master. Nobody. In no field.

Karan Thapar: So you are saying that the need to keep learning ...

Dev Anand: The need to keep learning is the need to live.

Karan Thapar: And that's what keeps you going?

Dev Anand: I think so.

Karan Thapar: So when you said in one of your interviews ages ago, 'I never give myself a chance to get depressed, I always think ahead, I always want to do something new,' that is something that really keeps you going?

Dev Anand: I think it is my temperament. The basic streak of optimism in me. But I am human. I also get depressed, but for a very short while. It is not worth it. Life is worth living and life is beautiful. I think you should throw away all the depression and the things that are ugly. Life is wonderful.

Karan Thapar: How easy is it to be like that?

Dev Anand: It is not easy, you should make it easy. You should make it feel easy for you. That's important.

Karan Thapar: As you have?

Dev Anand: A lot of things are involved. I think I again come back to the same statement. Your involvement makes it very easy. Your involvement, tremendous involvement, cent percent involvement in whatever you do.

Karan Thapar: But it also seems that you have enormous will power and enormous determination.

Dev Anand: I think yes, will power is very important. Of course the whole world will push you and ride on your

shoulders and bug you and gun you down, but again your own personality, your own achievement in whatever you are doing, must give you the confidence and I think that keeps you going. Don't look to your left, don't look to your right, don't look behind you; look straight ahead and look at Mount Everest and you will climb it.

Karan Thapar: That was a wonderful way to sum up the way you have made your career. Let's take a break and then I want to come back and talk about the style that you made your own, not the determination but the style that is so uniquely Dev Anand. Don't go away.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back, my guest is the incredible Dev Anand. Dev, lets talk about your style as an actor. When the world takes your name there are certain things that immediately come to everyone's mind. One of them is your rapid-fire dialogue delivery. And I can see you talk like a sten gun.

Dev Anand: I think it's just me, I talk that way because I think fast and I think it happened in *Guide* because there were scenes written and they needed a very fast delivery. But then again fast delivery does not mean that your voice must not be clear to the listeners but I think the faster you speak the faster you convey sentiment and the better it is even for cinema.

Karan Thapar: But of course the other thing that everyone remembers about you is the incredible array of caps that you wore and the shirts that were buttoned up right to the chin.

Dev Anand: Now listen to me. I have always hung on to my habits right from childhood. I love buttoning my

shirts. I love caps. I love scarves, I love socks, I love belts. I still love the same things that I loved fifty years ago.

Karan Thapar: So how come you don't have a cap on your head today?

Dev Anand: I have it in my hand.

Karan Thapar: You have it in your hand.

Dev Anand: You want me to wear it?

Karan Thapar: I want you to indeed.

Dev Anand: Okay, if you like it, tell me. Here it is—one second, hold on. You see, the right tilts. I can't see the mirror. But I love caps. In India when you go into the streets and you are a known person you can't be yourself. You are recognized, you are embarrassed. People call after you, they want to shake hands with you. They love you, they surround you. And I am very good with the people, I am very good with the audience because they have made me what I am—I had better be good to them. But when I go abroad I make it a point to go to Oxford Street and if I go to America I visit Fifth Avenue just to buy a good cap or a scarf. Good caps are not available in this country. I love wearing them because it is a habit again; maybe subconsciously everybody is hung on some habits in a very subtle psychological way. And this is one of my habits because I thought to myself after seeing one of my films that I look good in a cap, maybe I do, I am not sure. It is a habit. I think I want to wear it all the time, it's very handy, you can it wear it when it is raining, you can wear it if there is sunshine and you want to ward off the sunshine—and number two it gives you style.

Karan Thapar: Style is important.

Dev Anand: It gives you style, it gives you a good gait.

Karan Thapar: Style is important to you, isn't it?

Dev Anand: Style is the man, style is the woman. And style has no definition. Often something very ordinary has style, something not so noticeable has style. If you notice something, if you notice a person or notice a certain thing in the street the way it is lying or is being exhibited, it is a style. Acting is style, you are a style. The way you interview your people. People can always tell it is Karan Thapar. They just have to close their eyes and they can say it is Karan Thapar. The way you are speaking. If you get away from it you are not Karan Thapar.

Karan Thapar: Tell me something then, if style is so important, how much of Dev Anand is actually a creation from inside Dev Anand's own mind? How much of Dev is actually crafted by him himself?

Dev Anand: Dev Anand is Dev Anand because Dev Anand himself is in to his style and when I am performing, what I perform, who I perform, what I am supposed to be even when I write, when I act—it is all different.

Karan Thapar: But the real Dev Anand is his own master. Is that what you are saying?

Dev Anand: I have to be real, otherwise I am not Dev Anand. If I am not Dev Anand I wouldn't be doing what I am doing.

Karan Thapar: There is another side to the image the world has of you and that is the romantic, you mentioned it briefly. Is it true that way back in the '40s Suraiya was the love of your life?

Dev Anand: Yes, I think I was in love with her.

Karan Thapar: Was she in love with you?

Dev Anand: I don't know. I think I was new and she was a star and I was probing my way into the movie industry and she was a great singer and she was a great

actress. I was cast in a film with her and we met each other. Suddenly I discovered that she was very friendly and she discovered that Dev was very friendly and we started getting close to each other and she developed more of a liking for me and it went from friendship to a love affair, probably it was the first girl I loved.

Karan Thapar: Was that a memorable experience?

Dev Anand: I think it was nice because the first relationship always makes a man out of you, it refines you. I think life should be romantic, not necessarily in terms of lovemaking or a love affair but if you are reading or writing a beautiful line it is romantic, if you're wearing a neck tie it is romantic, your speaking is romantic.

Karan Thapar: And would you also say that falling in love is a lovely way of being?

Dev Anand: I think everybody falls in love; one should fall in love unless you are piece of wood.

Karan Thapar: They say, and I don't know if it is true so correct me, that you and Suraiya had planned to elope during the filming of *Jeet*. Is that true? And then she chickened out?

Dev Anand: I wouldn't elope with anybody. I would just openly say look I am going out with you and let the world know; but then again I think. Suraiya was not interested in matrimony and maybe things turned the right way because if we had got married things would have been different for me.

Karan Thapar: But did she agree?

Dev Anand: I grew because of that separation. I grew a hell of a lot as a man, as a human being, as a performer, as a thinker.

Karan Thapar: You are saying once again that the pain and the suffering that you went through when the relationship broke helped you grow as a man.

Dev Anand: I think so, pain and suffering is there every day.

Karan Thapar: But it must have been difficult at that time?

Dev Anand: Temporarily yes, temporarily. Again, I am a very optimistic man. Come back to Dev Anand's character. My sufferings and my sorrow and my sadness are very short lived.

Karan Thapar: In 1954 of course you did get married. And you got married to the lady who is your wife today, Kalpana Kartik. Is it true that the marriage happened during a lunch break during the shooting of *Taxi Driver*?

Dev Anand: Yes, Yes. Because we decided that marriage is a very personal affair, a very, very personal affair. So if it is a personal affair let's get married first and then announce to the world, instead of having a big band baaja and hundreds and thousands of people being invited.

Karan Thapar: So what did you say to the crew? Did you tell them that you were going to get married?

Dev Anand: Nobody knew except my cameraman who was a friend. But we gave the news later. Even my brother who was directing didn't know.

Karan Thapar: He had no idea that Dev had gone to get married?

Dev Anand: And that was one of the thrills of getting married.

Karan Thapar: You have been married and in the year 2004 it will be you 50th anniversary?

Dev Anand: Yes. We got married in 1954.

Karan Thapar: Are you happily married?

Dev Anand: Well yes, by any standards. We are together. We have been living together no matter what the world says, we have a son, we have a daughter. We are very much part of a family.

Karan Thapar: Are you a family man? Are you very close to your family?

Dev Anand: How do you define a family man? I am in show business, I am mostly away from home, I am doing my pictures, I am on location, I am writing my films. I want isolation, I want to go away into the mountains, I love the mountains, I want to just get into a corner and shut myself to do a bit of writing. I get into my moods. I am not the type who will stick around and say look I am a family man. You take it for granted that she is my wife and he is my husband and he is my son and she is my daughter.

Karan Thapar: In a way you are lucky that she accepts all that.

Dev Anand: I think she has probably learnt to accept it.

Karan Thapar: They say that you keep notes about your life, or you maintain a dairy. Is that true?

Dev Anand: I write in my dairy.

Karan Thapar: Every single day?

Dev Anand: I write my diary but lots of my diaries have been lost because you cannot keep diaries or letters forever. I started my career in 1945, they get rusted, they get bad with age, yellow with age and dust. Trunks get lost, but there is so much to say, I am going to write something.

Karan Thapar: Will you write an autobiography?

Dev Anand: Yes, I want to, but I do not know when I can because every time I finish a film I rush in to another one. But I think I am very fast in my execution. If I decide that I am going to write it, it just takes me four weeks to get away somewhere and do it; nobody should know where I am. I am going to do something and say something which the world will be thrilled to read because life started from 1945, my entire career till right now sitting in front of you—this is the latest—note the time. Karan Thapar interviewed me, so much to say. Indian Independence Day in 1947, and so much more.

Karan Thapar: Dev, on behalf of all your many fans, take those four weeks and write that book. It has been a pleasure speaking to you.

Dev Anand: I shall, I shall. Thank you.

Karan Thapar: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 25 September 2002.

Both Love in Times Square *and* Mr Prime Minister, *Dev Anand's next picture, proved to be resounding flops, but Dev Anand has stuck to filmmaking. His many fans are still waiting for his autobiography.*

Kapil Dev

Two years ago things couldn't have been worse for him. He was accused of match fixing and when he appeared on the BBC he broke down and cried uncontrollably. Today of course he is on top of the world. He has become the Wisden Indian Cricketer of the Century and now he has started a new career as a TV interviewer. So is this vindication and how does he look back on his life that has taken some very difficult twists and turns? Those are just two of the many questions I should put today to the legend of Indian cricket—Kapil Dev.

Karan Thapar: You know you've won the Wisden Indian Cricketer of the Century. After all that you've been through in the last two years, what does it mean to you?

Kapil Dev: I think if you don't go through the pain, you don't know what happiness is. One can relish more, one can enjoy more, and I think I'm just enjoying it.

Karan Thapar: do you see this award as simply recognition of your cricketing achievement or is it in a sense a vindication of your integrity and your character?

Kapil Dev: I don't know. I think they are two different things altogether. I think it is important for me and for my life as a cricketer. They pick the cricketer of the century. Any sportsperson, any person who plays the

game, would like to be in my shoes and this is a different thing from what happened two years back. And you are the culprit. *(Both laugh)*

Karan Thapar: You know you often said that what you went through was a trial by fire. Unfortunately, that phrase is almost a cliché.

Kapil Dev: Ah, well, the first few weeks were very bad but then as long as I knew myself I wasn't bothered. I don't have to convince anybody. My conscience is clear and I don't give a damn about anything after that.

Karan Thapar: At that time, when you were here, you were sitting in front of me in this very studio and you broke down and cried uncontrollably. Many people criticized you for crying. Do you regret it?

Kapil Dev: Not at all. I am a human being and if I can't cry then I am a different person. Some people can cry and some can't. I think human beings have this good quality or bad quality. You can laugh and you can cry and other people don't do that. Other people have no feelings.

Karan Thapar: In a sense were your tears your way of expressing your anger and your frustration, perhaps even your sense of helplessness at that time?

Kapil Dev: Not really. Sometimes you go through that and you say well, why can't people who have seen me for twenty years and who know me inside out know better? But it's just that some people enjoy seeing people going through a rough time.

Karan Thapar: You thought people were taking enjoyment out of your suffering?

Kapil Dev: I don't know. Perhaps some of the people were having a laugh. And again it cuts both ways. You

cry and somebody says he is genuine and you cry and somebody says he is acting. If something comes out, sometimes you cannot control your emotions. Sometimes you see a very good movie where there's a funny scene and you start smiling, why do you smile then? And sometimes a serious thing happens and you cry. Your parents die or somebody very close to you dies and you start crying. Can you control it? No, I couldn't control myself.

Karan Thapar: Are you a very emotional person?

Kapil Dev: Yes. I'm very emotional, not on the field. Off the field, yes.

Karan Thapar: And you are happy to let your emotions show. It doesn't embarrass you in any way?

Kapil Dev: No. That's how I am and that's how I like to live life. I don't want to give false impressions. Take it or not—entirely up to you.

Karan Thapar: You know, in your life you have seen many ups and downs.

Kapil Dev: I have seen more ups than downs.

Karan Thapar: But when you look back on your life you feel that fate has played games and tricks with you?

Kapil Dev: No. I think that life always goes up and down. And that's how it is. But you have to work towards your destiny also. And I think both good and bad parts come in life and you take it as it comes.

Karan Thapar: Let's go back to the very beginning of how your destiny began. Is it true that in fact you began playing cricket because it was the best way of bunking school?

Kapil Dev: *(laughs)* Hundred percent. I was a terrible student. Never ever wanted to study at all. And I think

every parent would like to see you at least have a basic education. I come from a business family. Their demand was that at least you study hard, enough to handle the business. I would do anything to run away from class, that's how much I hated it.

Karan Thapar: You began playing competitive cricket when you were just thirteen. I was told that it actually happened by accident one day.

Kapil Dev: *(laughs)* I was the youngest kid in my family. My big brother used to play cricket and when your younger brother comes out they always say keep him in a corner. And I was always picking up the ball and handling the bat and pads. Then one day they didn't have anybody and they had to make me play. It happened by accident.

Karan Thapar: This was the game at Sector 16, Chandigarh, wasn't it?

Kapil Dev: Yes. I was born and brought up very close to the cricket ground of Sector 16 and we used to play matches, one sector against another sector, and I was rather lucky somebody got sick or didn't turn up and I had to play.

Karan Thapar: You were more than lucky. You impressed people with the way you played that day. Do you remember the score?

Kapil Dev: I don't remember exactly what happened but I remember I made a lot of impact with my batting and bowling, both, whatever they had given me. And I was just throwing myself because I got a chance to play with such big guys. You know, your heroes in the street. And you are playing and you want to impress them. That's the first job.

Karan Thapar: Over the career that then followed you've had some incredible moments. There was the Melbourne Test in 1980 when you were pretty badly injured. You had a hamstring injury. Yet you insisted on playing and won the match for India. Do challenges like that bring out the best in you?

Kapil Dev: Yes. Sometimes. I enjoy proving people wrong. I really enjoy that. And that was something. When somebody says you are injured, you will be out for three weeks, I didn't believe that I cannot play for three weeks. So I used to get up in the middle of the night, put ice and salt together to drop the temperature of the ice and apply it so that the blood circulation can go slower. By the fourth day I started feeling okay. The fifth day was the only time when I took a risk. I went into the ground with cricket at the back of my mind. It was my thigh muscle you know. 'Let me bowl a few overs,' I said to Sunny. And till six overs I didn't get a wicket. I was just more conscious about that. Once I started bowling five-six overs I came to know there was no pain there. I could bear it. Then Sunil said, 'You want a break?' I said, 'Sunny, give me another couple of overs. I think I am feeling better now,' and he said, 'I hope you are okay. Are you sure?' I said, 'It seems like I am fine.' And after that was history.

Karan Thapar: You went on to take 5 wickets for 28 runs. Did you surprise yourself?

Kapil Dev: Ah, yes. Many times I have surprised myself. Not once.

Karan Thapar: You said something very interesting. You said a moment ago, 'I like to prove people wrong.' Are you a naturally rebellious person? Do you like to defy people?

Kapil Dev: No. I think in our system people are judgmental about certain things without reason. My dearest friend, a very close friend, said you can't get 400 wickets. I said ok. I had only got 300-odd wickets and I had a bet and he said done. So when I got 400 wickets, I didn't call my family or my wife or my mother. I called him. And I said, hey man, and he said, 'I am sorry. I lost the bet.' So it's best not to make a judgment unless you are very sure.

Karan Thapar: but you know you really proved people wrong in '83 when everyone said that India couldn't win the World Cup and you went and showed them that India could.

Kapil Dev: I think our team did that. When somebody says I did it in '83, I say no. I think that we had such a wonderful team. Everybody was a part of it.

Karan Thapar: No doubt. I was going to point out something else. Everyone remembers that moment of victory but most people tend to forget that India got bowled out for a mere 183 runs. A score that everyone thought the West Indies could quite easily beat. So at that point, halfway through the game, were you determined to prove everyone wrong and say we are going to win or were you beginning to get just a little bit scared?

Kapil Dev: No, I think I remember very clearly the thoughts that were in my mind as we went in to the dressing room. I said listen we've reached here and nobody has given us credit for reaching the finals. So we are the winner anyway, no matter what. Let's give our best. We got 183. The other team has to make 183 to beat us. That was my last word, I remember, in the dressing room when we were going out to field. Let's give our best effort. And let's see if they can get 183.

Karan Thapar: And when Amarnath took Michael Holding's wicket what was the first thought that went through your mind?

Kapil Dev: I don't remember. I think we were so overjoyed and happy—it was a celebration with everybody coming and hugging each other till very late. Till even a couple of years later we didn't realize what had happened. We were so young. I was only twenty-one or twenty-two and being a captain of the team at the age of twenty-two, you don't know what's happening. We were just enjoying ourselves.

Karan Thapar: It wasn't just that you were captain Kapil. Do you remember the match against Zimbabwe in Tunbridge Wells? Many people say that was perhaps your greatest moment. As you said you were twenty-one or twenty-two. You came in with India tottering at 17 for 5 and you knew you had to carry the entire game on your shoulders. Were you nervous, were you scared or did you try not to think about it at all?

Kapil Dev: No, I think I still remember I said ooooh, we must get 300 runs plus. And if we got 300 runs then if we lost the next match also we were through to the semifinals. Never thought that we could be in such a stage where we were struggling to even make a 100 runs. And after the match started before we said Jack Robinson we were 4 or 5 down. We couldn't even discuss and try to plan at that moment. Every over somebody was getting out. And without thinking I was standing in the middle and I kept on telling myself, come on, relax and play the full quota of overs, play the full quota of overs, which is actually against my nature of cricket.

Karan Thapar: So you had to actually play against your temperament?

Kapil Dev: Totally. But I told myself let's make a respectable total. Otherwise it will be terrible. In those days there was a lunch break. Today it's only a 10 minutes break for drinks; then we played 35 overs and had a lunch break. I came to the dressing room and nobody was there. There was a glass of orange juice and a glass of water on one side and I just come out and nobody was there and I removed my pads and went to the dining table and everybody started laughing. And we had a good laugh. The senior cricketers were ready to help me and they said let him not lose his temper. He is still playing and I just had a cup of tea and went back into the ground. Later when I asked everyone they said we did it deliberately because we didn't want you to lose your concentration. You were playing so well.

Karan Thapar: You know, in the years that followed, the press often used to compare you with Gavaskar. They would say that you were rivals. They would say that there was tension between you, perhaps even that you didn't like each other. What was the truth of your relationship?

Kapil Dev: The best part was he wasn't an all rounder, so there was no fight as such. No, I think he is such a great player. You realize as the time goes how important it was for us to play with him. Yes, difference of opinion was always there. So many times his way of thinking was totally different from mine but I think never ever in my life did I deny him his chance or disrespect his ability or his cricket. It was only a difference of opinions. Sometimes the media turned it into hype.

Karan Thapar: Was it always the media? In '84, just after the Delhi Test you got dropped for the Calcutta Test and the media said this was because you had defied

Gavaskar in Delhi. You insisted on hitting out when Gavaskar wanted you to play more surely and steadily?

Kapil Dev: Well, I don't know, at the end of the day I think the selectors decided and Sunil was also part of that. They wanted to teach me a lesson and I thought fair enough. Again a judgment from the selectors.

Karan Thapar: When you got dropped, did you feel angry or were you humiliated?

Kapil Dev: I think I was hurt. And I still remember a lot of people called me back. Tiger Pataudi called me and he said—very nicely he put it—'I'll appreciate it if you don't take any decision that can harm your life later on. These things do happen. Relax.'

Karan Thapar: You mean you were close to giving up cricket, you were that hurt?

Kapil Dev: I was. You know at that moment you can say anything. Sometimes it happens that you say something for which you may feel sorry, you can give a statement or something. I think Tiger Pataudi was the first person who called me and said 'Kapil take it easy, don't say anything which won't be very good.' I think coming from such a senior player—and everybody used to look up to Tiger and his judgment about the game—it made an impact and I said fine and I still I remember his words relaxed me a lot.

Karan Thapar: You not only came back to the team, but you also went on to become captain a second time. But you did face a peculiar criticism as captain. They said he is tactically naïve. He is a captain who doesn't use strategy. Were they being very unfair or perhaps when you look at it in hindsight fifteen years later were they being a little correct?

Kapil Dev: They always have to say something, and it's fine by me. People have said a lot of things about me.

Karan Thapar: So the critics are wrong?

Kapil Dev: No, perhaps if you see it from their point of view, maybe I am not so much of a chess player. I played my game from the heart and I always believed that's the way a sportsperson should play.

Karan Thapar: Was that what happened in '87 in the semifinals against England during the second World Cup when you were captain? You got out trying to hit a six and everyone said that was an unnecessary stroke and they blamed you for the defeat.

Kapil Dev: Yes, finally, but if you are in the middle it happens. So many times I've hit it. It sometimes went out of the ground too. And at that time I was playing at the best of my ability. So when you are trying to play a shot and you get out, yes, that's what the people should do.

Karan Thapar: But was there a mistake on your part?

Kapil Dev: Now when I look back it was a mistake on my part, or a mistake on the part of all the eleven. Why should we get out when we try to score? So you play bad shots, you can criticize yourself but nobody wants to lose at that stage.

Karan Thapar: Kapil, let's take a break now; I want to come back in part II and talk about the new career that you have just begun, as a television interviewer and perhaps just a little bit on the sort of person you are. We'll be back in a moment's time. Don't go away.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back, my guest is the incredible Kapil Dev. Kapil, you've just started a new

career on Sony Max television as an interviewer. How did this come about?

Kapil Dev: Well, I actually did one show with Srikkanth on *Good Night Cricket* and I really enjoyed talking to the people and speaking my mind. From there I think Sony Max had taken cricket rights till 2007. And they were looking for somebody and I was enjoying this new thing because I can't become a writer or a commentator and you still like to do something and give back something to cricket.

Karan Thapar: This was another challenge you were determined to take on?

Kapil Dev: Yes, I think just to myself, I feel more comfortable doing these things. Still, I'm not the best speaker. But Sony has a lot of confidence in me. I am still uneasy and trying to do a new job.

Karan Thapar: What is it that makes you uneasy, is it self-consciousness or is it the fact that you don't want the world to see you except at your best?

Kapil Dev: Well, there's that but I know I enjoy doing interviews because I feel people should speak from the heart and very seldom people come out with statements from the heart.

Karan Thapar: Have you made anyone cry so far?

Kapil Dev: No, I think mostly I like making people laugh. I think the fun is in enjoying yourself. In the interviews I did for Sony Max, people are more relaxed to talk to me because I don't like to make them take the negative point.

Karan Thapar: You have interviewed both cricketers and major film stars. Which is the easier of the two?

Kapil Dev: I think cricketers come much easier because I know them so well and they can't really fool me. But I have lived with cricket for so long that I am still trying to

catch up with film stars now. I start reading, trying to know about the person; only if you know about the person you can ask questions and you can talk to them. Basically I find they want to give you their mind but they hesitate to tell the real story.

Karan Thapar: Because they are shy themselves?

Kapil Dev: I find a lot of people unwilling to talk about their real age, or their childhood, or sometimes they suffer from a complex about their negative traits.

Karan Thapar: So the challenge is to draw it out of them without making them uncomfortable?

Kapil Dev: Yes. I feel everybody should give their story because when you become famous your past cannot become all-good in a flash; you have gone through rough days and the people want to know it, the common person wants to know and empathize.

Karan Thapar: You said a very interesting thing. You can't become famous at one go, everyone's had bad moments in their life. When you look back to the little boy who used to steal the neighbour's guavas and who used to ring their front door bell and run away, are you sometimes surprised by how far you have come in life?

Kapil Dev: Yes. If I'd known I wouldn't have done that but nobody knows. Nobody knew even from Amitabh Bachchan to the Prime Minister that they will one day become what they've become today.

Karan Thapar: Are you surprised by your own success?

Kapil Dev: Yes. Somehow I feel I've done my best but again every time you go on improving, you go on doing better and then your life keeps on changing.

Karan Thapar: They often say that Kapil's most important qualities are his determination and his positive attitude. Would you agree with that?

Kapil Dev: Yes. I think I come from a family where we are a very determined lot. I wasn't the best speaker at one stage and now people call me to give a lecture on determination for half an hour or one hour. So I think it took me a lot of time to work towards that. But if I can do it I think other people can do it also.

Karan Thapar: So your motto in life is never give up, keep trying?

Kapil Dev: Yes. You have to have determination, you have to have the ability to learn everyday. If somebody says you are very intelligent, I think it is wrong because the more you learn the more you come to know how ignorant you are. Everyday you learn so much you say oh wow, I didn't know that.

Karan Thapar: Kapil, it's a pleasure to see you smiling again. Thank you for a wonderful interview.

Kapil Dev: Thank you very much.

Karan Thapar: No more crying, huh?

Kapil Dev: *(laughs)*

This interview was telecast on 4 September 2002. In a previous interview telecast on BBC on 10 May 2000 (where Karan Thapar was once again the interviewer) Kapil Dev had broken down on camera when questioned about his alleged involvement in the match-fixing scam.

{8}

Karan Johar

He is probably the youngest director Bombay has produced. He is certainly the most successful. Now the world is awaiting his new film with bated breath. But what is he himself like? So far that has been a mystery, but today it could be about to change because he is my guest. His name is, wait for it, Karan Johar.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme Karan.

Karan Johar: Thank you Karan.

Karan Thapar: My compliments on your name. Your parents clearly have good taste.

Karan Johar: They do, don't they.

Karan Thapar: Now, I gather your fascination with Hindi films goes all the way back to your childhood, but at same the time I am told you were quite embarrassed about it. Why?

Karan Johar: It wasn't considered cool to watch Hindi films when I was in school. So I used to lie to all of them in school and I said my father was an exporter. And I said, 'Oh, we don't make Hindi films at all. They are so uncool.'

Karan Thapar: So what happened when one of your father's films actually came out? Didn't they recognize the name?

Karan Johar: I was in the ninth standard when my father's film *Mukkadar Ka Faisla* released, and it was

this big multi-starrer; in the Mahalaxmi area in Bombay there was this big banner which said Yash Johar's *Mukkadar Ka Faisla*. So everyone in school said isn't that film your father's, and I said, 'No, no way, that's not my father's, that's somebody else's. My father is an exporter. We don't make Hindi films.'

Karan Thapar: So you tried to put as much distance between Bollywood and your father as a producer and yourself.

Karan Johar: Completely. They were a different world for me and I didn't want to acknowledge it at all for some odd reason.

Karan Thapar: But there was a Hindi film that you used to come back from school practically every day and watch on the VHS. Do you remember?

Karan Johar: *Silsila*; I watched it about forty times, if not eighty, I don't remember. I just watched it every day. I just loved it.

Karan Thapar: So you were leading two lives at that time.

Karan Johar: Yeah. One at home and one back at school. The exporter and the filmmaker in me. There was a big tussle.

Karan Thapar: But I gather it was your friendship with Aditya Chopra that actually got you into making films. And it all happened by accident?

Karan Johar: Well yes, actually Aditya Chopra is someone I have known ever since I was a child. We used to meet at birthday parties, these filmi birthday parties. Especially Abhishek and Shweta's, that's Mr Bachchan's two children, annually they used to have this big party in March.

Karan Thapar: And you would meet him at the party.

Karan Johar: I used to meet him. Adi—we all call him Adi—and his brother were there and I used to come back to my mother and say, 'Don't send me to these parties, this Juhu gang, they are so filmi and they only talk in Hindi.' My mother said, 'How can you say something like this.' I said, 'They *are* very filmi. They only discuss Hindi films and it is so appalling, and don't send me there, it's very varni.' My mother used to get very upset. 'You can't say that. We are all family friends.' And I bumped into Adi again when I was in college. We had a common friend, we met again, and we got really close. And I think he made me realize that I had a filmmaker in me which I was just running away from. I had thought of studying Mass Communication and being a journalist.

Karan Thapar: And you were preparing to go to Paris, weren't you?

Karan Johar: Yes I was. I had done my French at the Alliance Francais in Bombay and I was ready to do my Mass Communication in French at a university in Paris. I was very keen to go there. I was all set to go there. I had planned everything. Paperwork, everything. Suddenly this change happened in my life.

Karan Thapar: Suddenly he offered you the position of an assistant for *Dilwale Dulhaniya?*

Karan Johar: I think he called me; we had got really close by then and we had watched a lot of movies together and one day he called me and said I have this story called *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* and I want to run it by you. Can I just come in? He used to stay in Juhu which is an hour and a half away from where I reside at Malabar Hills. So he came there and he just narrated it to me. And

he said what do you think? I said it's great, it's fantastic and it's so lovely; he said I haven't scripted it, it's just a thought. So he started coming every day for three weeks and I used to keep wondering why he keeps coming to ask me for my opinion. And he would keep coming and say how do you think Raj and Simran should meet and how should this happen, how should that, and I used to keep giving my, what I thought very amateur, kind of opinions on the plot and one fine day after three weeks he said you are so closely associated with the film, you have been part of the screenplay, the whole process, why don't you assist me? I said, 'Me, make a Hindi film, no it's not in me, I can't do it, I can't direct a film, I just don't have it in me.' He said, 'Think about it. I think you have it in you.' And I don't know what made me think that maybe it was something I had in me always and I hadn't realized it till then. So I ran it by my mother. And she said you have to ask your father. I ran it by him. He said why are you assisting Aditya? Assist Yash Chopra. You know he is the big man. I said something makes me feel I should assist him. Just let me be this one year. Let me see what happens. So that's how it all happened.

Karan Thapar: You acted in the film too.

Karan Johar: Let's not get into that.

Karan Thapar: Why?

Karan Johar: That is rude and mean of you to bring up.

Karan Thapar: You had to prove that Karan Johar is an actor.

Karan Johar: Not at all. Didn't you see the film and how awful I was? My mother refused to acknowledge that it was me. God, it was a nightmare.

Karan Thapar: So if I were to say that he looked just like you, you wouldn't like it at all.

Karan Johar: No not at all. Actually there was someone else that was supposed to do it. We were in Switzerland and the boy who was supposed to do it got malaria in Bombay and he couldn't fly down, so suddenly Shah Rukh and Adi were looking really upset and were sitting in one of the chalets in which we were shooting. And Adi said that boy hasn't come in and somebody has to do the role and I said really, try to think who could do it, and suddenly Shah Rukh said I know who is going to do it. It's going to be you. So I said, 'No, no, I can't do it,' and they just made me do it. Somewhere deep inside I think I was quite happy doing it at that point of time. I was very excited.

Karan Thapar: In fact Shah Rukh has played a major role in influencing you today because I gather that the idea that you should direct your first film wasn't yours, it was his?

Karan Johar: Yes, I still remember the moment—we were sitting outside, we were shooting in a hotel in Switzerland. We were sitting and having coffee and he said Karan you should direct. I said yes, in another seven or eight years. I think I should assist Adi some more and then probably get some more practical experience. He said no, I think you should direct immediately. I said no, I think you have lost it. I can't do it immediately, I need some more training and he said no, I think you should, and Kajol was hanging around behind and she said what are you talking about? So Shah Rukh said, 'I told Karan that if he directs his first film I'll do it,' and she said, 'If you are doing it so will I.' So I looked at them and said

how sweet of them and thought they will soon forget about it.

Karan Thapar: So one day at the coffee shop it all just fell into place foı you.

Karan Johar: When I came back to Bombay he followed it up. He called me up and said come and meet me, and I'll offer you dates, October '97, and that's exactly what he did.

Karan Thapar: And the amazing thing is you did everything—you weren't just the director, you were the scriptwriter, you did the dialogues. How come you decided to play practically all the important roles?

Karan Johar: I don't know. Adi told me, Karan, you can write the story. I kept saying should I, can I, don't know if I can do it. He said you are a better writer than me.

Karan Thapar: But it was in the varni as you called it.

Karan Johar: Yes it was very varni. By then I thought it was the coolest thing to do, to make a Hindi film.

Karan Thapar: Do you speak the language properly?

Karan Johar: Yes I do. Don't start on that now. I stutter on camera, but I can write my dialogues. I think I can.

Karan Thapar: The amazing thing is you had never made a movie before and here you were as a director, script writer, dialogue writer—where did you start?

Karan Johar: I ran away to London for about four–five months. My parents and I went on a vacation and I decided to stay on and I had two ideas in my mind, two films that I thought I would make in my lifetime, and actually *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* is a blend of those two ideas, and in fact I still remember the point where I thought I could connect the two.

Karan Thapar: You needed to go to London to just put it all together?

Karan Johar: Not at all. That sounds quite strange, that I needed to go to London. I was just there when I thought of this idea. I remember calling Adi from one of those red phone booths, I said I think I have got it. This is what I am going to make. And I still remember telling him the one scene of the film where I said this is going to be the interval point. That was one story, a triangle between a tomboy girl, a pretty girl and a boy in college. There was one story about a little child trying to find somebody for her father and I blended the two stories together. That's how *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was born.

Karan Thapar: It's amazing how much of that film is actually derived from what you have learnt from films of others. So how much were you consciously or unconsciously re-creating and imitating?

Karan Johar: I am spontaneously inspired by the works of very great filmmakers, before my time. I am completely inspired by Yash Chopra and Raj Kapoor, and all that is reflected in my cinemas.

Karan Thapar: The beginning of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*: 'Aye Rahul, mujhse dosti karoge?'

Karan Johar: That's my ode to *Bobby*.

Karan Thapar: Absolutely.

Karan Johar: I used to love that line when I saw the advertising campaign of *Bobby*, 'Hi, I am Bobby, mujhse dosti karoge?' I used to love that line. I can't say I paid a tribute to such a great man but in my own way I just wanted a part of *Bobby* in my own film. That's how I managed to do it.

Karan Thapar: The movie went on to become an absolute hit. Eight Filmfare awards, third all time highest

grosser. At any point of time when you were working on the film did you feel you had this miracle on your hands?

Karan Johar: I did think that it was a miracle. I hoped, I prayed and I knew somewhere it had the makings of being a big hit. But I didn't know the level. You can never really predict that.

Karan Thapar: Why do you think the film reached that level? Why do you think the film has been so successful?

Karan Johar: It had the story. And very few films have a good story these days. And the aspect of the film that was the strongest was the fact that it had a story. I think that quite connected with millions of people.

Karan Thapar: The story.

Karan Johar: The fact that it had one.

Karan Thapar: Let me read to you one of the rare critical comments that the film has got. It says, 'a hyper-sensitized barrage of cheesy sentiment, badly lip-synced dance and song routines, and in the end the boy meets girl scenario shot in nauseating soft focus with wind machines, rain machines and endlessly flooding tear ducts.' Now I suppose bit by bit it might be accurate. Why do you think that's the case?

Karan Johar: First tell me who wrote that. I'll kill him. Or her, whoever wrote this. But actually, yes, I have never heard that comment before so it's completely thrown me off.

Karan Thapar: Do you like it?

Karan Johar: No. You never do. But I understand what the critic is trying to say. Because it is a designed weepy. And it was designed to look very glamorous and very colourful so there is a lot of thought that went into it. I

can't say that it was very natural and it was a designed weepy. I knew that people would cry.

Karan Thapar: Why did you design it to be a weepy? Why is it important for people to cry? Because they do by the way. I howled

Karan Johar: I howled my way to the bank. You are bound to cry.

Karan Thapar: So the more they cry the more they do you a favour.

Karan Johar: I think that's a case in point. I think the more you cry the more money the film generates. People love to have a good cry. I know I like to have a good cry. I love crying at the movie hall. And I knew my first film would be a weepy.

Karan Thapar: Tell me something, do you think that movies that make people cry touch them emotionally deep down? And is that the reason that your film actually succeeds because it invokes your emotions almost uncomfortably at times? And that actually leaves people feeling good? It's a paradox.

Karan Johar: Very true, I think everybody has so much in them emotionally and I think that a film is just a kind of justification for it all to come out. Everyone has their tiny personal problems, their tragedies, life is full of them. And I think when you watch a film something connects, a character connects, or something in your life connects with that situation and you come out with it and you can easily justify that it is the film but it is actually something to do with your life at times.

Karan Thapar: So when you hear the title *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, it is not only *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* happening on the screen between the actors, it is also *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* happening between the audience and the movie?

Karan Johar: I think *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* is a film about first love and we have all experienced it, we all have memories of our first love, of the first person that we have ever loved and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* throws you back into your past. Loads of people have told me that they all remember the first girl they have ever loved. I think therefore it connected on various kinds of levels.

Karan Thapar: So it's nostalgia?

Karan Johar: But it is also tears and weeping. And it also has a child in it and children make people cry and I knew it.

Karan Thapar: Karan, let us now take a break. I want to come back in Part Two and talk a little bit about the man who deliberately set out to make us cry and try and find out whether he himself cries or does nothing but laugh. We'll be back in a couple of minutes. Stick with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back, my guest is Karan Johar. I gather as a child you were fat and spoilt?

Karan Johar: I'm fat now and not spoilt anymore.

Karan Thapar: You're not fat any longer.

Karan Johar: No, these are all the layers effect of dressing.

Karan Thapar: Were you fat?

Karan Johar: Very fat, I was obscenely fat.

Karan Thapar: What is obscenely fat? I thought Indian children were supposed to be fat and cute, particularly Punjabi boys.

Karan Johar: I was fat, I wasn't cute from any angle, in fact I was all 100 kilos of meat, I was very ugly.

Karan Thapar: I was also told that your adolescent size and shape was a source of great consternation at school?

Karan Johar: I was always the last one chosen in the team, it was like who'll take Karan, it was ten chosen, who'll take him this time, so it was always okay, okay we'll take him this time but not next time. So it was really quite sad. Once I was very excited, it was tug of war, they told me you have to be the anchor; I got so excited, it was a sports event and it was me they wanted to be the anchor. But then I realized that the other boys were so thin they had to balance the weight. They needed somebody who was over 85 or 100 kilos and that was me. When I realized that I was really quite depressed. I went home crying that day.

Karan Thapar: You joke about that quite easily today but that was the time when you were very young. It must have been very difficult to handle.

Karan Johar: It was initially, I hated going down to play with the others, I couldn't do what they could do and yet I was too lazy to do anything about it. I didn't have that drive, which I still don't. I still don't exercise. That time it was quite upsetting, so that the time I decided to just leave it all and go to boarding school, which I did.

Karan Thapar: That's when you left Green Lawns at Bombay and moved to Panchgani?

Karan Johar: That was another phase of my life. That was quite strange.

Karan Thapar: Because you only spent six days there. Was it a nightmare?

Karan Johar: I gave a farewell party and off I was. And I was back in six days and everyone wanted their presents back. I even tried to run away from Panchgani. I was completely depressed, I reached there and it was a new school and they followed a different system of

education, a Bahai system of education; so there were lots of people who were from different age groups in one class. I was twelve at that time, and there were fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds and they put me up in a senior dormitory, Kanga house dormitory, they called it. I was ragged the first day. The second day I had people coming and telling me why are you here? You're fine, your family set up is fine, why are you here? It was the third night I decided to run, I packed my little bag and I tried to escape from the school. I rolled down the hill and right up to the watchman's foot and he picked me up and brought me right back. The next day my father came and there was a lot of crying and a lot of hoo and haa and I was back.

Karan Thapar: And six days later you were back. But how did you think that that was what actually changed you, gave you the confidence you didn't have earlier?

Karan Johar: It did, completely. I always say that that was a turning point in my life. I came back to school, I came into my own. I started taking part in all the extra curricular activities, I started taking part in debates and dramas, and all the things I was good at, and just never acknowledged before—and I loved school. I became very popular in the last two years of school and the teachers loved me. I became better at my studies.

Karan Thapar: Had you become thin by then or were you still fat?

Karan Johar: No, I was still fat, but I just didn't care at that point of time, everything else took over; and I thank Panchgani for that phase in my life, if I hadn't gone I would not have discovered myself the way I did.

Karan Thapar: But running away after six days became a sort of habit. I think you did it again years

later when you joined Xavier's College in Bombay. Six days later you were out of there too?

Karan Johar: That was my mother's fault and I'm saying this to her, it was because she said how can you do arts! I wanted to do Arts at St. Xavier's. She said behenjis do arts because they learn sociology and how could you learn subjects like sociology and psychology, you are a man and must do commerce. And she's great and I always tease her about it and the strange thing about that too, is that I have to thank her as well because had I done arts at St. Xavier's I would probably not have landed up here. Because I went to HR College of Commerce and Economics I met a friend who made me meet Adi. I always say I'm destiny's child, things just have to happen.

Karan Thapar: Yes, Destiny's child is perhaps a great description of you because in a way it's going to be proven by the new movie you have coming out. Your second film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* is coming out. There's a lot of talk about the incredible cast you've put together. Who all are in it?

Karan Johar: Oh dear, it has Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol, Hrithik Roshan and Kareena Kapoor.

Karan Thapar: My God!

Karan Johar: And it has Rani Mukherji, who is a very close friend, in a special appearance.

Karan Thapar: And I gather this could very well be Kajol's last appearance in a proper film.

Karan Johar: Well, I know it's a great loss to cinema and to me as filmmaker, but for a long time she may not be seen on screen. I think she may just want to take a break.

Karan Thapar: You know after the great success of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and the incredible feedback from audiences and the awards, now reinforced by the incredible cast that you've got, are you under a lot of pressure?

Karan Johar: I am, I can't sleep at night.

Karan Thapar: You mean that.

Karan Johar: Yeah I do.

Karan Thapar: You don't look as if you're sleepless.

Karan Johar: No no, I am, I'm completely, trust me, don't go by the look. I'm completely hysterical, I get very stressed out, I'm very, very scared.

Karan Thapar: What are you panicky about, that the movie may not succeed?

Karan Johar: The expectations. It's just that I feel that whatever I do may not be enough.

Karan Thapar: What is the story about?

Karan Johar: Now that you have to watch, that I can't tell you

Karan Thapar: Not even a hint?

Karan Johar: It's umm, I'll tell you—it's, the line of the film is *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and it's all about loving your parents. I hope to get that across in the film.

Karan Thapar: Is it another weepy?

Karan Johar: I'm not saying.

Karan Thapar: I gather from the trade magazines that you've got two great achievements under your belt. You've managed to make Amitabh Bachchan sing for you.

Karan Johar: No he hasn't, that's incorrect actually. He's definitely doing a dance in the film, but he's not singing. There was a kind of an item, but he's not singing, it's a song sung by Sudesh Bhosle.

Karan Thapar: That's world's disappointment no.1.

Karan Johar: Yeah.

Karan Thapar: The other thing that the trade mag's been saying is that you've recreated on your sets both London and Chandni Chowk.

Karan Johar: Yeah it was the interiors of London that we put up. Chandni Chowk we put up at Film City and we've tried to be kind of authentic about it. We have done that.

Karan Thapar: So what's the release date for this movie?

Karan Johar: December, I'm not yet sure about the date. It's sometime in December this year.

Karan Thapar: You're also doing something else that no one's done before. You are writing a book on the making of this film.

Karan Johar: Yeah , we're attempting to do that.

Karan Thapar: That precedes the movie.

Karan Johar: It will be released with the film.

Karan Thapar: So inside the film is a director who is also a marketing man.

Karan Johar: You know I'm not market savvy at all. You think that I'm trying to do that with this film, you think that I'm trying to bring in merchandising in a very big way and with this book I'm attempting to do that., but I'm not at all, don't get me wrong.

Karan Thapar: So whose idea was it?

Karan Johar: The book was the idea of a friend of mine who is also a journalist, and who's called Niranjan. He came up with the idea, he came and asked me, you know, why don't we do it like *Titanic*, because we'd just finished reading *The Making of the Titanic*, he said it's a

big film with a big cast, so it would make an interesting book. So I said okay let's go for it and I think there are other people doing that as well. Lots of others are following suit.

Karan Thapar: The world really knows you as a film director, but you also do design clothes. Particularly, I gather, for Amitabh Bachchan..

Karan Johar: Ah no, in the film *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* Amitabh Bachchan's clothes are being done by Manish Malhotra. I did help him out in *Mohabbatein*. I did all the clothes for him in *Mohabbatein*, but I think it's a passion. I love designing clothes. I love designing clothes on the side.

Karan Thapar: What sort of clothes do you design? Do you design your own clothes as well?

Karan Johar: At times I do, at times I do.

Karan Thapar: The jacket, the polo neck or both?

Karan Johar: No, no just the jacket, the polo neck is not my design.

Karan Thapar: I gather that there are a couple of occasions on which Amitabh has worn your clothes on *Kaun Banega Crorepati.*

Karan Johar: Initially I made an improvised Jodhpuri which he kind of liked very much and all the guys at KBC liked it very much. He then wore it initially in the first episode, and then they kind of followed the pattern later. He took it from *Mohabbatein*, it was one of the patterns from *Mohabbattein*.

Karan Thapar: Now I have to ask you, you're barely twenty-eight, you're an extremely successful director, in fact one of the most successful ones. Where do you go from here, what next?

Karan Johar: Now you're scaring me. But this one I'm making and then I've decided to make something kind of radically different the third time round. The second one was this huge star cast and, and it's a big film and its kind of a family drama. I've decided to do different things after that. I want to do something radically different the third time round. I hope I can achieve that.

Karan Thapar: What does success mean to you?

Karan Johar: Happiness.

Karan Thapar: That's all?

Karan Johar: Yeah if it doesn't come with that then it doesn't mean anything to me.

Karan Thapar: So what about recognition, fame, adulation?

Karan Johar: All those I think come with success but I think that if at the end of it you're not really happy with what you're doing at that point of time, then I think you haven't achieved anything.

Karan Thapar: But when you look back to the days when you were a big fat boy and you weren't successful and you were full of complexes, does today's achievement make you laugh? Smile?

Karan Johar: It makes me wonder, as to how this has happened. I always ... it's very strange, but at the risk of sounding very, um, kind of strange about the whole thing , but I stared believing in God much more now than ever I did before. Over the last five years. I just feel that he's done this, I couldn't have done this on my own.

Karan Thapar: Destiny's child, is that what you mean?

Karan Johar: It's just strange, everything has just happened to me. I haven't planned anything, I didn't plan, I didn't plan to be fat as I was. I didn't plan to meet Aditya

Chopra, he came into my life, I didn't plan to make my first film. I didn't plan to make *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*. I just haven't planned to be anything. I didn't plan to win all those awards that I did. All that just happened to me.

Karan Thapar: God did it?

Karan Johar: Yeah, someone's doing it somewhere, and it has to be Him, I don't think anyone loves me as much as he does.

Karan Thapar: In which case when is God going to arrange for you to get married?

Karan Johar: That is the Big Question. I plan to, actually after my second film, plan to, because I haven't managed to find anyone, so I'm going to get some really nice focused photographs taken and send them all over the place, if anyone's interested I'm available.

Karan Thapar: But as you said you haven't found anyone in all the millions who want to catch you. You still have a chance.

Karan Johar: I don't think anyone wants to catch me, otherwise they would have already. I still think I'll have to set married the arranged way. I don't think love is coming my way at all.

Karan Thapar: Well good luck, Karan.With a name like that you definitely can't go wrong. Thank you for a wonderful interview.

Karan Johar: Thank you so much.

This interview was telecast on 28 March 2001.

Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham *was released at the end of 2001 and proved to be major hit. Karan Johar's next directorial venture* Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna *is scheduled for release in 2006.*

{9}

Kumar Mangalam Birla

The name has been a symbol for money, power and success. Mr Birla's only thirty-three, but his friends say he's likely to take the family fortunes to a new height. So what is he like and what does he make of his job? Today is your chance to find out as I introduce you to Kumar Mangalam Birla.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Kumar.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Thanks Karan.

Karan Thapar: Now, five and a half years ago you took over the Aditya Birla Group in very tragic circumstances. It was an awesome responsibility and yet you were barely twenty-eight. Were you apprehensive?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Of course I was apprehensive. But I think I also had the faith that things would work out well, I had the faith in what my father had taught me, I had faith in my education. And, I'm also bit of a fatalist, which I think helps on occasion. And I was optimistic as well.

Karan Thapar: You know, I suppose it's a bit like being thrown into the deep end of a pool. Were you ever scared or worried that you may not be able to swim as well as you needed to?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Oh, very often. I thought of that very often. But, that was just a phase and it would pass. And I just said to myself that I have to hang in there.

Karan Thapar: Were you conscious of the fact that you were under the close scrutiny of the whole corporate world? That in a sense you were on trial?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I was aware of it, Karan. But I didn't think too much about it. I was so absorbed with work and there was so much to be done, so much to be looked into that, fortunately, I didn't get too much time to brood over it.

Karan Thapar: Of course, many people were saying to themselves, 'Maybe he won't do it,' they were in a sense looking for signs of failure. Did that worry you or unnerve you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No, actually I think there were a lot of people who were rooting for me too, who were hoping and praying that I'd make it. And they were the people I'd look to, more than the few critics out there.

Karan Thapar: Did their support give you strength?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely, I think that their support at that important time was very critical to me.

Karan Thapar: At the end of the day, of course, you were stepping into the shoes of someone who wasn't just your father, he was also an extremely illustrious businessman, perhaps the best of his generation. And being younger you clearly would have wanted to do things your own way. Was that a difficult tightrope to walk?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: It was. He was a very strong personality and a very successful businessman. But also, Karan, he'd imbued in us a sense of independence and a sense of our own identity, which is very important to me. And I wasn't trying to be an iconoclast. But I was doing things which I thought were right for the moment. And also from a longer-term perspective for the organization.

It was difficult because I think people needed to understand why things were being done differently. And we spent a lot of time communicating about that.

Karan Thapar: In fact, there were two things in particular that were striking innovations introduced by you. One was called the 360 degree Feedback Operation Programme so that people could tell you what they thought of you, and the other was your personal involvement in recruiting straight from business schools. Would your father have approved of that?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I think he would have. He was a great innovator. He was a great lateral thinker and when he saw a new idea and a good idea, he jumped at it and I think he would have really liked both of these actually.

Karan Thapar: How much of a chance did he get to actually prepare you for this succession?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, ever since he'd got to know of his illness, he made a conscious effort to make sure that I'd got exposed to the various parts of the organization, acted in on meetings with him for all parts of the business. I was already responsible for a significant part of the organization ...

Karan Thapar: You had been sitting in on meetings with Dad since when you were in college, hadn't you? You had your apprenticeship in your college days virtually?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely. I think that was great learning, Karan. I spent many hours for a couple of years just sitting with him and observing him.

Karan Thapar: And you'd sit in total silence, just sit and watch and learn?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well no, I'd actually butt in quite often and ask questions; I think at that age you're much less conscious of things and that helped. He encouraged me to ask questions and I learned a lot in the process.

Karan Thapar: Were you very close to him?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Oh yes, of course. We were very close. I respected him a great deal and Dad was always someone distinct in the father-son relationship. We had a very strong bond together.

Karan Thapar: Your grandfather says that when you were a baby, your father would come back often early from office, so that he could bathe you and sometimes even feed you.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Yes, I believe so. I think that's so wonderful. I wish I could do that with my kids.

Karan Thapar: You can't? Or you don't?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well I just ...

Karan Thapar: Or you won't?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I think, you know, he had a way with children which I don't. When he was with children he was like a child himself.

Karan Thapar: In 1974, I believe you were barely six and you got meningitis. I gather he took two months off from office so that he could be with you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: That's right.

Karan Thapar: Do you remember that period?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No Karan, I have no memory of that period. All I know is that, it was a bad phase and the whole family helped out together beautifully and got through it.

Karan Thapar: Now, it was during that period when he was in a sense by your bedside, that he began painting, didn't he?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: That's right.

Karan Thapar: So did he often sit beside you and paint?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: He would; I think it was a good way to shift the focus and it was a good stress reliever for him.

Karan Thapar: Sixteen years later you repaid the compliment because you encouraged him to hold his first exhibition.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: He was actually very shy about doing that and he'd had a pretty nice body of work by then, most of which were of course copies of masterpieces, but very good all the same. And you know, we kind of egged him on to show his work and that actually was quite a hit.

Karan Thapar: We mentioned his illness. I gather he discovered he had cancer by responding to an ad he had seen in Washington airport.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: That's right. We were on this roadshow. And he casually mentioned reading about this ad and didn't tell us about any symptoms that he had himself. It's only when we came back to Bombay that he told us about it and then things went fast.

Karan Thapar: It went very fast because six weeks later they confirmed the diagnosis and probably his own suspicion. How do you recall the day when he actually had to break the sad news to you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: That Karan was heart-wrenching and it's a time when you suddenly feel alone and exposed and vulnerable, just wanting to hold on and not let go of someone.

Karan Thapar: It was a complete shock to you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Over the next two years you actually saw your father visibly and rapidly deteriorating in front of your eyes and there was absolutely nothing that you could do to help him. How difficult was that for you to cope with?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, in a sense that was a very difficult phase. But he was very brave about it and he fought it very bravely and that gave us a lot of courage. And he kept up his spirit. He'd make sure that we'd all be cheerful.

Karan Thapar: So are you telling me that he was tending to all of you, he was making sure that his family stayed strong?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Yes absolutely, he went out and about his normal routine as if things were hunky-dory and he actually helped us all get through it.

Karan Thapar: At any point in those two years did you come to accept that he was going to die or were you hoping for a miracle right to the end?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No Karan, I actually never thought he'd die and I always thought in the last few days that something would happen and he'd be all right. It was only in the morning, the morning that that he passed away, that we had to face up to the fact that he didn't have too much time and that things were deteriorating very rapidly.

Karan Thapar: Your grandfather said that during those last terrible weeks you began reading the *Hanuman Chalisa* to him practically every day. Did that help you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well I think it was a family scene, the whole family sitting together and praying every evening and that was a great feeling of solace and comfort for all of us.

Karan Thapar: He must have given you a lot of advice, knowing himself that what he was saying would last with you for a long time. Is it true that just before he died, there were some special words that he said to you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, just before he went into a coma, he told my mother and my sister to be brave and he said that he had achieved a lot in life and God had given him much more than he had ever hoped for, and that life is to be enjoyed and that you know we should have no regrets at all.

Karan Thapar: In a sense he was saying you must get over this and lead your own life?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Don't keep looking back.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: He's given you the right sort of advice. He was already anticipating the sense of loss and the horrible vacuum you'd feel. And he was holding your hand and taking you across that awful chasm.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Yes, I think he was doing his duty as a father even then, which is quite remarkable.

Karan Thapar: But as you said, he went into a coma before he died; two weeks before he died he was in a coma. Did you miss a chance to actually say goodbye properly?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No, not really. I think, that would have been very painful.

Karan Thapar: And then when he died, there was this awful personal loss on the one hand and the terrific onerous responsibility sitting on the other.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well actually, this onerous responsibility that you talk about, for me at that point of

time was a great escape. Because so much had happened in the last few months and I just needed to, all of us actually needed to, move on as he would have liked. And so, that really was a great escape.

Karan Thapar: Was it a solace?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: In fact you threw yourself into it. 'Be brave' for you became 'just do your job and keep on doing it'.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely. I think the day after we were in Bombay was the cremation and the morning after that I was at work. And I think that actually helped to a large extent.

Karan Thapar: Come on, let's take a break. I want to come back in Part 2 and talk about the other side of your life. What it was like growing up as a Birla boy and how you look upon yourself today.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Sure.

Karan Thapar: We'll be back in just a couple of moments, stick with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is Kumar Mangalam Birla. Let's talk about you personally, Kumar. You were an only child for the first nine years of your life?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: That's right.

Karan Thapar: Were you spoilt?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No Karan, not at all. I was doted upon by the whole family. There was a lot of love, warmth. It was like being in a cocoon, but I was never spoilt.

Karan Thapar: You had a dad who adored you. So, who disciplined you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, my mom disciplined me and also I think my dad and my grandfather and my great grandfather, they all doted on me and were very fond of me, but they all had their do's and don'ts as well, so there was always a flip side to that.

Karan Thapar: And you learnt the do's and don'ts pretty quickly?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Oh, very quickly. I knew how far I could stretch with each one of them.

Karan Thapar: So before corporate strategy came child strategy? *(Laughs)*

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I think kids are much smarter at doing that today actually.

Karan Thapar: And do your kids do that with you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: All the time, all the time. They get me foxed all the time.

Karan Thapar: Well, are you as indulgent as your father was? I know you said on the forefront you're more shy, but are you as indulgent?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, yes, I think I am.

Karan Thapar: Being an only child can be lonely as well. Were there moments of loneliness being the only son in a big house, with parents who had clearly other things to do?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Not really, Karan. My mother was a full time mother and she'd decided that she'd spend all the time till the children grew up to be with us and I think that was a great support in the growing years.

Karan Thapar: Your parents I know used to take you to see lots of films when you were young. Do you remember the sort of films you went and saw?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Not really. But we spent a lot of time together on weekends. We'd go to the movies, we had a place at Juhu that we'd go to very often. So weekends were for the family and my father spent all Saturday and Sunday with us, which was a very nice thing.

Karan Thapar: So you grew up knowing that weekends would be time with daddy?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Was it a very close, self-sufficient family?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: It was, it still is actually, very self-sufficient and very happy with ourselves and in ourselves but also there were a lot of friends and a lot of fun and laughter which was nice.

Karan Thapar: Your grandfather says that he was a precocious child even capable of being naughty.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: What does he say?

Karan Thapar: Were you that, first tell me?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, I'm not so sure about that really.

Karan Thapar: Which bit? Company Chairman can't be naughty? *(Laughs)* He said that there was a particular occasion when your grandmother took you to see a school in Calcutta run by the family. Remember?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, actually my grandmother took me to see the school and she wanted me to start studying there. She took me around the whole school and kept telling me how wonderful it was and at the end of it I said to her, if you like it so much why don't you stay back and I'm going right back home. I've never heard the end of it since then. *(Laughs)*

Karan Thapar: So that's become grandfather's favourite story.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Your father took a very close interest in your education. Is that one reason why at the same time you were doing a B.Com degree, you also did a degree in Chartered Accountancy?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, we'd actually discussed it and talked a lot and what we felt was, both he and I, that CA would be a very good foundation—which it was, and so we felt why not use the time to also do a CA degree.

Karan Thapar: He certainly believed in making you slog, didn't he?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: He did, he made me work very hard actually.

Karan Thapar: Are you a wiz with figures? All your colleagues say you can look at a sheet of paper and make an awful lot out of it.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well I wish I was a wiz, but I'm quite comfortable with numbers.

Karan Thapar: They don't throw you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No, they don't.

Karan Thapar: All types of figures, or only those on a piece of paper? *(Laughs)*

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Only those on a piece of paper. *(Laughs)*

Karan Thapar: In 1989 ...

Kumar Mangalam Birla: My wife is going to be watching this you know.

Karan Thapar: So you can't admit to anything else. In 1989, you got married to your wife Neerja. How did you meet?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: We met through a common friend, we didn't know their family at all, and we come from very different backgrounds actually. And she was actually in the same school as my sister. And she was head girl of the school and my sister of course knew about her, I didn't. And there was this common friend who told my parents about her and my sister immediately perked up and said, 'Yes of course, I know about her, she was head girl of my school.' And that's how the whole thing started off.

Karan Thapar: You were twenty-one at the time, I know it was an arranged marriage. But did your father have to persuade you very hard?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: He did. I took some time to make up my mind.

Karan Thapar: What was the problem? Because you were too young?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I thought I was too young and, what was the hurry and things like that. But I think things worked out well.

Karan Thapar: Well, today you have two children of your own, is your family life as a father and a husband very different from when you were a son?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Not really, but I think that our generation of fathers is more involved with their children on a day to day basis.

Karan Thapar: So are you your son's friend?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well I keep trying to be. And he keeps discounting me all the time. *(Laughs)*

Karan Thapar: Are you as tough with him, to make sure that he studies?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: No, no, I think that tables have turned. He's quite tough on me now.

Karan Thapar: He takes daddy for a ride?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely, so does my daughter.

Karan Thapar: Do they speak?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: All the time.

Karan Thapar: They say that Kumar Mangalam Birla is an introvert. You don't look like one, do you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I am an introvert. I think I like spending time with myself. I like being with a few friends. I'm not the sort of person who loves partying and going out every night, so in many ways I am an introvert.

Karan Thapar: What do you mean when you say you like spending time with yourself, do you mean you actually need time completely on your own?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I think I need my own space. I need some time every day to be with myself and think of things I'd like to be doing and how I'd like to think differently.

Karan Thapar: But does that mean that even when you're with your family, you'd like your own space?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I do, that's very important for me.

Karan Thapar: Are you a bit of a recluse as well as being private?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, I'm not a recluse at all, but I am a private person.

Karan Thapar: And that seems important to you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Very important.

Karan Thapar: Does the family understand it?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Oh, absolutely. I think they understand that and they respect that and they give me a lot of my own space.

Karan Thapar: Now you are probably one of the richest people in the country. What does money mean to a very, very rich man?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, I think money is more a means rather than an end. We were brought up with this concept of trusteeship, that we're actually trustees and the work we're doing is on behalf of the shareholders of the company and that's something that has stayed on very strongly.

Karan Thapar: But how do you spend your wealth, I mean do you like cars or clothes or nice holidays or are those things not important to you?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, no, of course one likes to have, at least one nice holiday a year and one is fond of splurging once in a while but I think that's only very occasional. It's not really a lifestyle.

Karan Thapar: So then what motivates you, if spending money can't be a motivation? What drives you to work harder and harder?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, I think that for a small part, a very small part actually, is a sense of duty. But I think for a very large part, it's a sense of fulfilment, it's a sense of wanting to grow as a person, as an individual, as a professional and the sense of excitement and challenge is so tremendous that I think that is what keeps me going.

Karan Thapar: Do you respond well to challenges?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I would intuitively like to take up a challenge. It comes to me almost automatically.

Karan Thapar: So if there's a difficult choice and an easy one, you'll go for the difficult one?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Oh, all the time. I did that in school also. When we had exams and if there was a choice in the papers, I'd pick the tough question.

Karan Thapar: Does that make it very difficult to be a businessman? I mean aren't you always setting yourself challenges that you don't need to set?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, that's true. But that's also what keeps the sense of challenge alive all the time and I think that's very important for me.

Karan Thapar: And at the end of the day, when you put your head down on your pillow, what is it that gives you a sense of satisfaction?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: The fact that I've done my best. And, if there are days when one hasn't really been able to do much and to achieve what one had set out to achieve for the day then I don't sleep very well.

Karan Thapar: You go to bed frustrated that night?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: I do.

Karan Thapar: A sense of unhappiness?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: In which case what's more important to you, being successful or being good?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well, I actually don't see that as an either-or situation. You can be both. And I have three role models in front of me, my father, my grandfather and my great grandfather. I think all of them have been very successful and at the same time very good.

Karan Thapar: Successful you definitely are. Would you say you're good?

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Well I think, for the most part of me I am. *(Laughs)*

Karan Thapar: And I won't embarrass you by asking you about the other part. Thank you for talking to me Kumar. Thank you very much.

Kumar Mangalam Birla: Thank you for a wonderful interview.

Karan Thapar: Thanks a lot.

This interview was telecast on 11 April 2001.

Kumar Mangalam Birla continues as Chairman of the Aditya Birla Group. In 2005 he was rated the seventh richest man in India.

{10}

Maharani Gayatri Devi

She's an icon of her time, her name conjures visions of beauty, her life is the stuff of fairy tales. Even thirty years after the de-recognition of princes, she's still called by her title. No one would dream of calling her anything else. But what is she like? Well, let's see if we can find out, as I introduce you to the one and only Gayatri Devi, Rajmata of Jaipur.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Thank you.

Karan Thapar: Now, of course your proper name is Gayatri Devi, but your friends and family have always called you Ayesha. How did you get that name?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: My mother was reading a book, I think by Ryder Haggard, and the woman's name was Ayesha. So she said, 'If I have a girl, I'll call her Ayesha.' And then when her Muslim friends came, they said to her, 'Oh, you've given her a Muslim name.' So Ayesha remained my name. But when I had my christening (Hindu), then of course it was Gayatri.

Karan Thapar: So she'd have preferred you to be Ayesha?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Well, I was always called Ayesha, but my real name was Gayatri. In the passport it was Gayatri.

Karan Thapar: Now, when your mother got married in 1913, the marriage was in fact very much a romantic talking point of the day. There's quite a story behind it, isn't there?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: There is a story behind it because she was engaged to the Maharaja of Gwalior. And she met my father at the Delhi Durbar, I think it was in 1911. They both fell in love with each other. And then she wrote to the Maharaja of Gwalior and said 'I'm not going to marry you.' So the Maharaja of Gwalior wrote to my grandfather in Baroda and he said, 'What does the princess mean?' So my mother was sent for. So then she said, 'I'm not going to marry him. I'm marrying the Maharaja of Coochbehar.'

Karan Thapar: It was quite a story and almost a scandal at the time. Such things didn't happen.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Not in Baroda. They were putting up the arches. They were getting ready for the wedding. And then my mother decided. It was about three or four years before eventually my grandfather allowed her to marry my father.

Karan Thapar: So she was subjected to quite a bit of withering scorn for her choice of husband?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Yes. Yes, she was. You see, because the Coochbehar family was very, very westernized, thanks to the British, and they took my paternal grandfather and he became Regent of Coochbehar when he was ten months old. So they took charge of him and sent him to England to school and all that sort of thing. And all the old ladies in Coochbehar decided he must get married early. So the British chose Keshab Chandra Sen's daughter, Suniti Devi. And that

was also quite a thing, because the Coochbehar people were very orthodox Hindus. Anyhow ...

Karan Thapar: And the Barodas were a very grand royal family and very different.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Very different, and the Coochbehar boys were educated at Eton and this side they went to the Red Court. They were very, very modern for those days, very western. Well, they married and soon after that my uncle died, my eldest uncle. So my father became Maharaja of Coochbehar. And then, he and my mother did a lot of good work together. And when my maternal grandfather eventually came to Coochbehar, he was very pleased with what he saw.

Karan Thapar: Sadly though, your father died when you were just three. Do you remember him?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: I remember him vaguely. I remember him standing in front of the fireplace with a dressing gown on and I remember coming back on the boat with my mother crying a lot and things like that. But that's the only kind of memory I really have of him.

Karan Thapar: You were brought up substantially by your mother after your father died, and she was not just a very beautiful lady, but vivacious and charming. Were you close to her?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Very close to her. And she was made Regent of Coochbehar because my brother was only eight years old.

Karan Thapar: She was a ruler in her own right?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: In a way. They had council meetings and things like that and she used to preside. She used to often ask my grandfather different questions and he would tell her how to proceed. Coochbehar was a very, very well ruled state and the people just adored us.

Karan Thapar: In your autobiography you say that one of the high points of your childhood was sitting in your mother's room as she dressed for dinner.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: That was later on. In the evenings, when she was dressing, nearly all the family used to come in and chit-chat and talk about this and that and if she had any female friends they would come too. And we used to hear all the gossip and what was going on and listen to their conversation with my mother ordering this, that and the other, sending us off, giving the others messages and all that sort of thing. Her guests used to call us the unpaid ADCs.

Karan Thapar: Your own childhood seems to be full of high spirits and pranks. Were you a bit of a tomboy?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: I was a tomboy. I hated it when we had to wear saris and things like that. I couldn't bear them. We used to wear churidaar pajamas and kurtas and then the rest of the time dresses and all that sort of thing. And I remember my younger brother saying to me 'Why are you always with the boys?' I was surely a tomboy.

Karan Thapar: They used to call you, the palace servants, the *pagli* Rajkumari.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: That's because I was always asking them questions about how they lived and 'Oh no, you ought to have another bedroom for the children,' you ought to do this, you ought to that. And all that sort of thing, interfering in everybody's lives and things like that. So that's why they called me *pagli* Rajkumari.

Karan Thapar: But side-by-side being *pagli* as they called you, you were quite a crack shot as well. How old were you when you bagged your first panther?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Eleven.

Karan Thapar: Eleven!

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Hmm. No, twelve I think.

Karan Thapar: And you simply found this opportunity, picked up a gun and shot it dead?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: No, actually Coochbehar was full of jungles and little patches of jungle were there everywhere. And these panthers or tigers used to kill the cattle and then the villagers used to come to the ADC room and say that there's such and such tiger or panther in such and such village and all that, so many miles from this, that, the other. Then the elephants would be dispatched. And when there were no guests, we could go. So this one time there were no guests and so I went. There was a panther and I shot it. My mother was in Delhi. So I sent her a telegram to say I shot my first panther.

Karan Thapar: What did she say?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: She sent a letter of congratulations. And my chap was here too, playing polo. So she told him. He also sent me a telegram.

Karan Thapar: Let's talk about the Maharaja of Jaipur. It wasn't much later. You were probably twelve, I think, when you met him.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: I met him first when I was about five in Ooty, when we used to go to Ooty for the summer. I remember when he came to stay with us. I must have been a little older, I must have been about fourteen. And he arrived with his wonderful polo ponies and things like that. We had a huge house in Calcutta, lots of stables and things like that because my father used to have race-horses. Anyhow, he came to stay and all of

us fell under his spell. Even the boys liked him. Everybody liked him a lot. He was a good sport. And he took notice of us. For instance with me, we had a huge lawn and he said 'I'll beat you in a bicycle race,' and I said 'No, you can't,' and of course he beat me, and at tennis. And I told my mother, 'He's not a very good player.' So she played him and got beaten hollow. She got very annoyed with me. Because she wasn't trying hard enough. Obviously I didn't realize because I was a child. And it was then that he told my mother that he would call me 'pet'. So she said 'You can't call her "pet".' So then he called me 'pat' and he always called me 'pat'. And we used to always go and watch him at polo and then he won this big polo tournament, the IPA (Indian Polo Association). Anyhow, then my mother said, 'Now, what would you like?' Me for dinner!

Karan Thapar: You were his prize for dinner?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Yes. So then there was a big dinner party. Of course I had saris, but I had no shoes to go with the saris. Naturally I didn't have evening shoes.

Karan Thapar: How old were you?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: About fourteen. So I was going round New Market in Calcutta with my mother's Swiss maid trying to find a pair of shoes that would fit me.

Karan Thapar: What followed was the famous dinner at Firpo's, wasn't it, where he had to cut your partridge for you?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Yes, the partridge came and I'd never eaten a partridge like that. If you had a *desi* style obviously, you could eat it with your hand. I didn't know how to cut it. So he cut it for me. And as soon as dinner was over I was sent home. But never mind. I'd gone out to Firpo's for dinner.

Karan Thapar: You write in your autobiography that after you met him you used to dream of being a groom so that you could look after his horse.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: When he first came to stay, we were moved out of our room and he stayed in our room and we went to a room downstairs. Then I used to think, 'I would like to be one of his grooms, he might touch my hand by mistake'.

Karan Thapar: You were completely swept off your feet?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: No, not completely swept off my feet. I was a bit of a tomboy, so I was not that type of a person. But I liked him a lot.

Karan Thapar: When he eventually came to propose, it happened in London in rather unusual circumstances.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: He was going back to India. So our governess rang up and said could my sister and I come and say good-bye to him. Then he rang me up and said can you come alone. So I went. And we went in his car to Hyde Park. He said, 'Now listen, I'm going to ask you a question but you don't have to stick by it because I fly, I play polo, I might have an accident and be crippled for life; but will you marry me?' I said yes. And he said 'But will you tell you mother?' And there! When I went to school in Switzerland, I didn't dare write to my mother.

Karan Thapar: So were you shy, scared or did you sense that she might disapprove?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: No, she'd say 'What the hell do you think you're doing, getting engaged to somebody?' I mean, to the Maharaja of Jaipur. I mean, I was sixteen and sixteen nowadays is very sophisticated, but in those days you were a child. Anyhow, I was in Switzerland

and my grandfather from Baroda came there and I saw one of his ADCs. And then I went to see him in the hotel and I said 'I don't know what to do because this is what's happened.' So he composed a telegram to send to His Highness, Jaipur saying that I'm so sorry but I hadn't still told her, and then I wrote to her.

Karan Thapar: So in fact the letter that you wrote to your mother telling her that you wanted to marry the Maharaja of Jaipur was in fact almost dictated by your Baroda grandfather's ADC?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Yes.

Karan Thapar: But your mother wasn't totally approving, was she?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Naturally not.

Karan Thapar: Because he was twice married.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: And she was very, very fond of his second wife.

Karan Thapar: And she didn't want her daughter to become the third Maharani.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: No, no. She was very fond of the second Maharani. She obviously wanted me to marry somebody who wasn't married before, preferably an Army officer or somebody. A lot of proposals used to come. But ...

Karan Thapar: There was also the problem of the fact that the other two Maharanis were in purdah and there was an age difference between the two of you. Did that not deter you for a moment at all?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Well, you know, eight years is not so much.

Karan Thapar: And the fact of purdah?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: I wasn't going to be in purdah. He told my mother. He said I need her because I don't

want her to be in purdah. She's never going to be in purdah. And I need her as a hostess, I need her as this, that, and the other.

Karan Thapar: Within two years or maybe just about three, you wore down your mother's opposition and she agreed. Were you determined all the way, or were you just a little obstinate as well?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Sometimes we weren't allowed to meet each other, so we'd meet secretly. Sometimes we were at the same party and so we met. And then the war came. And he said to my mother, 'Now I'm going to marry her. Because I'm going to go to the war and I must marry her before I go.' So she agreed. And in 1940 we got married.

Karan Thapar: And you were just about twenty-one.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Twenty-one.

Karan Thapar: Rajmata, let's take a break. I want to come back in Part II and talk about what it was like being the Maharani of Jaipur, and all the other interesting things that you've done in your life. We'll be back in just a few moments. Stick with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is the Rajmata of Jaipur. For many years after your marriage, you lived half in purdah, half out, as you say in your book. What was that like?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Well, when I said half in purdah, it was only when I went to the city palace for ceremonial things that I went in a purdah car. And if there was a big party or a wedding, then I would be with the purdah ladies. Or watching some state function and

things like that, I would be with the purdah ladies with the other Maharanis. But I used to play tennis, I used to go riding, I used to drive my own car. I used to go to the polo games in my own car and things like that. So I wasn't what you call strictly in purdah.

Karan Thapar: The interesting thing is that although you spoke fluent English and Bengali your husband wasn't keen that you should learn Hindi even though that was the language that would have helped. Why was that?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: It was a big court, the court in Jaipur, lots of ladies, lots of people and the city palace. He didn't want me to get mixed up in the court politics.

Karan Thapar: So in a sense he was protecting you?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: In a sense he was protecting me. But I regretted it like mad. He didn't let me learn so I never learnt properly. And then, you see, in the zenana the sort of politics used to go on which he didn't want me to get into—one Maharani against the other—so he didn't want me to learn it. I was friendly with the second Maharani and I had a lot of respect for the elder one. But, he didn't want me to get mixed up in that gossip. While on the other hand the administration in Jaipur was completely free of intrigue; Mirza Ismail in his book writes what he liked best about Jaipur was the lack of intrigue.

Karan Thapar: In 1962, you joined politics and got elected as an MP. What took you into politics? It seems so different to the life you were leading.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Well, in 1957 my husband was Rajpramukh of Rajasthan. In 1957, the Congress asked him if I would stand as the MP from Jaipur. And then they rang me up and they came and saw me. So I went rushing to his room and said 'Guess what...?' Of

course they'd already consulted him. So he said, 'Well, why not. You're bound to be a minister.' Then a young Rajput from the Bhuswami Sangh came and said '*Humne suna ki aap aisa kar rahe hain. Hamare party ki bohot nuksaan hogi.*' It will be a big loss for our party. So then I thought, 'No, I must be with them.' And then I refused the Congress offer. Also, I hated making speeches, I hated the whole thing. Then, the Swatantra Party started, Rajaji's party. And I was already getting fed up of the Congress nationality thing. When Rajaji's Swatantra Party started, I asked my husband if I could join it.

Karan Thapar: What did he say?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: It was early in the morning, so he said yes. And I was going out for a ride. So as I left the house I said, find out who the secretary for the Swatantra Party is and ask him to come here. So, at breakfast time I said how does one join this party. It was only eight annas. And we had one rupee. So one of the Maharaja's younger sons, he and I joined together. And then we had to go to the city palace, because he was getting engaged and there was a big ceremony at the city palace. When we came back, the ADC said, 'What's happened? The phone never stops ringing. Everybody's asking if you've joined the Swatantra Party.' So I kept quiet. I said 'No, no of course not.' And then one of my friends who was there at the time said, 'How could you have done this at such a time, when the Queen's coming to visit you? It's an insult to the government.' I didn't think that my joining the Swatantra Party would make such a hoo haa.

Karan Thapar: It was a hornet's nest for you from the word go.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: But I never realized it, you see. Well, I didn't realize I suppose, how important I was. I mean, in the eyes of the public.

Karan Thapar: And you found out in a very strange way in '75 when Indira Gandhi decided to sort of compliment you by putting you in jail.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: But she wouldn't have done it if I'd joined her party. That's one point I must make. But then after joining the Swatantra Party, the next thing that happened was that I got a letter from the General Secretary, at that time it was Minu Masani, asking if I'd stand from Jaipur. So I went rushing to my husband and I said, 'Listen, they want me to stand.' He said, 'But you joined the party.' And I said, 'To help them, but not to be a Member of Parliament.'

Karan Thapar: You were a member for three terms running.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Yes, and the first term I was in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

Karan Thapar: For the biggest majority, a hundred and seventy thousand.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: And when I got to the Parliament, some other young princes who were in the Central Hall said, 'Oh, if we'd been in the opposition, we would have also got so many votes.' So I said, 'Why weren't you?' And during the elections, I will never forget, there was one day free. So my people who were helping me asked me, 'What would you like to do today?' So I said, 'Call all the heads of the Panchayats and none of you will be there.' So then I asked them, 'Listen, I'm standing for Parliament representing you. I don't know any of your problems. I'll learn slowly. But there's a day

for withdrawal. If you want me to withdraw, I will withdraw if you don't want me.' So they kept quiet for a bit; it had been fourteen years since the state had been merged. So they said, '*Chauda saal ke baad, Ram vapas aaye, to aap hi ko vote milega. Aur aap virodhi paksh se khade ho rahe hain, khud ke liye nahin kar rahe hain. Hamare liye kar rahe hain.*' (Ram had returned after fourteen years too, and it's you we will vote for. You are standing from the other side, you're not doing it for yourself, but for us.)

Karan Thapar: In '75, Mrs Gandhi clapped you in jail. You spent several months in Tihar Jail. In your book you write about it almost with a sense of humuor. Must've been dreadful.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Well, you see the thing is, she was arresting me from within the opposition. I asked our lawyers. I said, 'Do you think I'll go to jail?' They said, 'Could be.' But what had happened was they couldn't find me because I was in Bombay having some medical treatment. When I came back to Delhi, I went into the Parliament. There was nobody, hardly anybody in the opposition benches and everybody looked at me very strangely. How the hell are you here? And then when I went home, and I had rest in the afternoon, the servants came knocking. They said, 'A police officer's here.' So I said yes, and they said, 'We've come to arrest you.' So I said, 'May I call my lawyer?' They said, 'No, you can't use the phone.' So I said, 'All right.' The servant was in the next room, Bhavani Singh, who had just been decorated with the Mahavir Chakra. So I went in there and I said, 'Can you lend me a suitcase?' He said, 'You've just come, where are you going now?' I said, 'To jail.' He

said, 'Don't be funny.' He put on a pair of trousers and he rushed into the room and they asked him if he was Bhavani Singh, because they had a warrant for his address. So the poor bugger, who was a Mahavir Chakra winner, was also taken off to jail. So there was the two of us. I was much happier then.

Karan Thapar: Rajmata, you're going to be eighty-three in May. When you look back on the life that you've led, has it been a good life?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: It's been a very good life. The only thing that perhaps I regret is that I shouldn't have gone into politics because then I could've had more time for my family, more time to do things with my children, my husband; my family would've been better off without it.

Karan Thapar: And how would you like the world to remember you?

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Well, as someone who has led a very full and interesting life, and tried to do something for the poor sections of society.

Karan Thapar: Rajmata of Jaipur, a pleasure having you on the programme.

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 20 February 2002.

Maharani Gayatri Devi, once cited as one of the ten most beautiful women in the world, remains active to this day.

{11}

R.K. Laxman

Few people make us laugh the way he does. For over fifty years his cartoons have held us in their thrall. But how does he do it and more importantly, what is he himself like? Well, those are just two of the many questions that I'm going to put today to India's greatest cartoonist, R.K. Laxman.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme.

R.K. Laxman: Thank you.

Karan Thapar: Let's start with the common man: he has been around for so long that most people think he is a member of the family, but how did you conceive of him?

R.K. Laxman: Well, he found me, I didn't find him. When we got our independence I had to do a lot of cartoons on Indians. The common people of this country came to be drawn many times and the common people were not the same, a Bengali doesn't look like a Maharashtrian, a Maharashtrian doesn't look like a Rajasthani or a Punjabi or a South Indian or a Keralite; so I had to draw them every time. Whenever the matter of a common man came into the theme I had to draw all of them which was time consuming, each one standing with his arms akimbo and scratching his nose. And journalists have no time at all, particularly the cartoonists. It takes about six hours to do a cartoon.

Karan Thapar: So you created the common man as a single individual?

R.K. Laxman: No, I used to draw a crowd of these people and slowly I started eliminating them one by one. The Rajasthani went, the Bengali went. Finally there was one man standing and watching me, smiling. That was the common man. He was balding, with a moustache and black eyebrows and large glasses and a big nose.

Karan Thapar: It has gone on to become as popular as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and yet I gather the great Shankar once told you to drop him?

R.K. Laxman: At that time Shankar thought I was creating something that would lower his own importance. Perhaps he thought so. Which indeed it did.

Karan Thapar: So he was jealous?

R.K. Laxman: He said that you should not draw the common man because then it won't be a political cartoon; nobody tells me anything, I am totally a self-made man and opinionated.

Karan Thapar: And determined to do what you want?

R.K. Laxman: Always.

Karan Thapar: And yet the amazing thing about your great career is that you were never formally trained to draw.

R.K. Laxman: Who can train a man like me? Nobody can and I never learnt it from anybody, there has been no teacher whatsoever.

Karan Thapar: You taught yourself?

R.K. Laxman: Completely. I've completely thought in the same style. I have looked at life around me, I have studied anatomy, drapery, perspective by myself. Many people have come to me and asked how to draw a cartoon. I say you start drawing from life, don't copy.

Karan Thapar: But you did once apply to the J.J School of Art in Bombay, didn't you?

R.K. Laxman: I did because I had failed in my SSC and I told my parents that I don't want to continue my studies because all my brothers were BA and BSC, MA and all that. I said, 'Ma'am, please let me go,' they said, 'Welcome, do it.' I applied for J.J School of Arts, then came the reply saying that 'You show no talent whatsoever for drawing or art.'

Karan Thapar: As bold a reply as that—you have no talent?

R.K. Laxman: 'Please continue your studies.' I continued my studies and passed in philosophy, economics, politics. European philosophy, Indian philosophy, economics, politics, which stood by me in my career because I could understand the economics of the country and the philosophy.

Karan Thapar: But the story about the J.J School of Arts doesn't end there, does it?

R.K. Laxman: Years later when I became somewhat known, the professors, not the same person who wrote the letter but about ten or fifteen years later another person came and said, 'Will you kindly come and distribute the prizes and awards for the new graduates?' I said, 'Yes.' I went around looking at the paintings of the young people, the award was given to them, I handed over the awards shaking hands with them and saying do well, very good, all the usual clichés. Then I sat down and rows of students looked at me and said, 'Speech, speech.' I said, 'I can't make any speech.' ' No, one short speech.' I made it, I got up and narrated how J.J School of Arts rejected me and also said, 'Thanks for rejecting

me, I am grateful to this institution, if I had been accepted four years ago I would have wasted time sitting in that corner learning nothing but ending up in an ad agency drawing faces of women and children and soaps and toothbrushes.'

Karan Thapar: And the common man would never have been. So what did the professors say?

R.K. Laxman: They clapped, some of them were shocked.

Karan Thapar: Of course, the J.J School's loss became the *Times of India*'s gain many years later. You've been with the daily for fifty years.

R.K. Laxman: Fifty-five years.

Karan Thapar: Fifty-five years, and I gather there is a very interesting story about how you got the job. I believe that you just walked in one day ...

R.K. Laxman: I resigned from the previous job which was a cartoonist's job in another newspaper. I walked upstairs and sat near the editor's chamber and sought an interview. They said, 'You can't see the editor, he is busy. What do you want?' I said, 'I am a cartoonist.' 'Oh! Go upstairs to see the art director.' I went upstairs. I didn't know what he looked like. The door opened and he walked out and he looked imposing huge arms, big, blonde hair, gruff voice. 'Who are you? You are R.K. Laxman. You have come to see me. Yes, what is it about?' 'I want to be a cartoonist.' 'Come in.' I went in. 'Where were you working?' I named the newspaper. 'Oh, you are R.K. Laxman? I like your cartoons, you draw something for me.' I drew. 'Very good. How much salary were you getting before?' '250, I want 300,' I said. He went down and got 500 rupees.

Karan Thapar: More than you ever thought you would get.

R.K. Laxman: No, I never imagined. After that *Times of India* looked after me very well, going abroad, coming back, everything.

Karan Thapar: But in the beginning when you joined the *Times of India* they didn't permit you to do political cartoons, did they?

R.K. Laxman: They did, they did, because there was this Berlin Wall and other things which suited the white man and ridiculing Hitler, Mussolini etc.

Karan Thapar: But there's a wonderful story you tell in your autobiography of the editor who you went and met and said that you would like to do political stuff and he found his own way of encouraging you. You used to do cartoons for him to begin with.

R.K. Laxman: I knew him and I said to him always don't publish them but have a look at them because I like this as a cartoonist. He saw them and laughed slowly. What he said was, 'You should have given the cartoon.' And I started giving. From that day on when he said, 'Give it,' I started giving.

Karan Thapar: Today, when you look at your cartoons do you intend them primarily as comic representation or are you also making a comment, perhaps even a critique?

R.K. Laxman: Critique is a better word, a critique of society, of politics, of stupidity, corruption.

Karan Thapar: My favourite Laxman cartoon was the day Indira Gandhi lost power in '77 and you showed a shopping trolley full of the family belongings and the little Sanjay ...

R.K. Laxman: That's right.

Karan Thapar: ...Holding a comic book in his hand saying I know mummy let's go to the new colony on the other side. Do you think you were being a little cruel?

R.K. Laxman: There is no such thing as cruelty. All humour, satire is a matter of cruelty. It's the way I look at it. What is cruel about it? Politicians are cruel to the people aren't they?

Karan Thapar: And a cartoonist is cruel to politicians. You got to know Indira Gandhi very well.

R.K. Laxman: Not very well. I met her once or twice, that's all.

Karan Thapar: Was she a joy from a cartoonist's point of view? Was she easy to caricature?

R.K. Laxman: She was easy to caricature but a grim person. But the one who was really good was Nehru. I wanted to see him for five minutes, he gave me five minutes in his house. I went and sat there, he wouldn't let me go, everything I told him he listened to and finally his secretary came and said, 'Sir, somebody is waiting,' 'Who?' He whispered – 'God, is it! Then I'll come up,' he said. Then he took me to the stairs and wished me well and I left.

Karan Thapar: Years later you almost created the way we think of Rajiv, you decided that you were going to pick on his nose and you turned it upwards.

R.K. Laxman: he was too handsome for a caricature so I distorted him the way I wanted and he started looking like my caricature afterwards.

Karan Thapar: So life started imitating cartoons.

R.K. Laxman: Yes.

Karan Thapar: What about today's politicians. Are they too bland?

R.K. Laxman: Very bland and colourless. Stereotypes, like rubber stamps. There is no one like Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Kripalani, Maulana Azad. Each one had an identity that does not exist today.

Karan Thapar: Has the challenge gone out for the cartoonist?

R.K. Laxman: It has to a great extent because politics has become full of corruption, corruption, corruption. There is no fun and emotion in it. There is no personality. Can you imagine a personality in Bengal today? They all look the same to me.

Karan Thapar: Why do all politicians look the same—is this, from the cartoonist's point of view, a sign that they have lost character?

R.K. Laxman: No, they want to look like the other fellow all the time, this fellow looks like that fellow. Same safari suit; there is no one like Kripalani and Maulana Azad.

Karan Thapar: So is the great R.K. Laxman a little bored?

R.K. Laxman: I am totally bored with the politics of this country and the newspapers.

Karan Thapar: You are bored with newspapers?

R.K. Laxman: But where's news? You don't have any these days.

Karan Thapar: So how do you motivate yourself every day? Every single day the cartoons keep coming.

R.K. Laxman: Well, it happens. I say that but there is always something somewhere.

Karan Thapar: That flash of inspiration still continues?

R.K. Laxman: Somewhere there is. Yes.

Karan Thapar: That spark is perhaps the most important thing in a cartoonist. How do you protect it,

how do you ensure that you don't lose the different way you think?

R.K. Laxman: I don't consciously try to protect or do anything. If it is there, it is there.

Karan Thapar: And one day if it stops being there it won't matter?

R.K. Laxman: It won't go. It will always be there.

Karan Thapar: You are confident of that?

R.K. Laxman: I am sure about it.

Karan Thapar: Let's take a break, I want to come back in Part Two and talk about the man who hasn't lost his confidence and whose spark continues just as it did before. We will be back in a couple of moments. See you then.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is the incredible R.K. Laxman. Let's talk about your childhood. You grew up in Mysore in the '20s and the '30s, you have five elder brothers and two sisters. Were you spoilt?

R.K. Laxman: To an extent, yes, because they let me free to do what I liked, climb the trees, run across around the compound wall, jump, catch the birds, let them go, things which are usually objected to by parents, I was allowed to do.

Karan Thapar: In your autobiography you describe your father as a cross between a Roman senator and a volcano and you nicknamed him the Tiger.

R.K. Laxman: I didn't nickname him, at the institution where he was teaching as headmaster, he was called a tiger, not by me. And he looked like a Roman senator, he was red and his cheekbones were high, he had an aquiline

nose and he was an enormous scholar, he used to read hundreds and thousands of books which we acquired later and the books were so many we gifted them to a high school.

Karan Thapar: You were very close to your mother, in fact in your book you write, 'Whatever I know I learnt from her.'

R.K. Laxman: Yes, she was a friend to not only me but to the rest of the family and a very talented person, whom I used to admire. She excelled in handicrafts and other things and won silver medals and so on.

Karan Thapar: And she played wonderful chess?

R.K. Laxman: And she played chess and defeated the champions of the university who used to come to our house, have a cup of coffee and play chess.

Karan Thapar: Were you very close to her?

R.K. Laxman: Yes of course. And then she was a very good tennis player also. My father was also a chess player and it was my father who taught her chess and finally he never won.

Karan Thapar: She beat him every time?

R.K. Laxman: Every time. And he was a tennis player also.

Karan Thapar: But the amazing thing is that your parents forgot to send you to school.

R.K. Laxman: Not forgot. They didn't believe in education of the type that existed.

Karan Thapar: But he was a teacher himself.

Karan Thapar: Yes, but then you know how it is, they just allowed me to grow freely; finally my uncle took me and admitted me to a school.

Karan Thapar: He picked you up one day and took you straight to school?

R.K. Laxman: I kicked my legs, but from then even on Sunday I wanted to go to school. I became a headache to my parents.

Karan Thapar: Now there was one particular friend of yours that you write about in your autobiography with whom together you created the 'Rough and tough and jolly cricket team'.

R.K. Laxman: His name was H.K. Krishnaswami. I call him HK. We created the rough and tough and jolly team. And he was a very close friend of mine. We used to bicycle together upto chamundi hills, we used to play together he used to be with me when I sketched in the market place, vegetable sellers and beggars and so on; he encouraged me by silently watching me sketch things on the street without interfering.

Karan Thapar: But there was a time when he actually made friends with someone else and you were very upset?

R.K. Laxman: Yes, he made friends with another friend called Sharif and all the time he was talking to him and going about with him.

Karan Thapar: Were you very possessive?

R.K. Laxman: Yes, but he never talked to me after that, he was always with Sharif. Then Sharif became a good friend of mine and all three of us together lived happily ever after.

Karan Thapar: Sadly HK died in very sad circumstances.

R.K. Laxman: Sad thing. When I came to Bombay seeking my job in *Times of India*, he found Mysore very dull so he also came and took up a small PG and lived there and he was a moneyed man. He took all the money and gave it to a stock exchange fellow who did him in.

Karan Thapar: So he lost everything.

R.K. Laxman: Everything, and he went mad, and died in an asylum.

Karan Thapar: In a lunatic asylum!

R.K. Laxman: Where else? It is sad.

Karan Thapar: You say from the very first memory you have, you wanted to do nothing else but draw.

R.K. Laxman: Yes. At the age of three-four I became very fond of crows, which I draw even today. The bird that is never noticed!

Karan Thapar: The crow and the common man are the two symbols of ...

R.K. Laxman: And the ganpati.

Karan Thapar: Three symbols of your pen.

R.K. Laxman: I usually exhibit them and there is a good market for the crows. Crows, ganpatis sell.

Karan Thapar: You did a cartoon on the floor when I think you must have been five or six, of your father. He wasn't very amused but it tickled your mother's fancy. Was that when R.K. Laxman the cartoonist was born?

R.K. Laxman: Well, I used to play around with chalk and charcoal; white walls were covered with charcoal drawings and the floor was covered with chalk drawings. My father was sitting and reading *The Hindu* and I sketched him not knowing that it has come out well. My mother was taking a cup of coffee to him. When she saw it, she burst into laughter. My father never laughed much. 'What is it?' 'You come and see.' He came and saw it. 'Mischievous fellow, what are your doing? Wipe it out.' My mother said, 'It is not going to be wiped out. All the other sons must come and see it.' 'No, it must go.' And it went on and I left the house and came back after two

hours. My mother had won, my father quietly sat in a corner and it was there for a number of days till dust and wind removed it.

Karan Thapar: From that small beginning—sketching on the floor of your home—you have gone on to become the greatest cartoonists this country has.

R.K. Laxman: Is it?

Karan Thapar: When you look back on your career are you satisfied? Have you done and shown everything you felt you could?

R.K. Laxman: Satisfaction never comes to a true artist.

Karan Thapar: So the hunger remains?

R.K. Laxman: There is always something I should have done which I didn't do. I have carved with wood, I have moulded with m-seal, things a common man can do. I painted on canvas and landscapes. I have written novels and short stories and essays which were all published by Penguin.

Karan Thapar: And you still want to do more?

R.K. Laxman: Something more. I have got an idea. I have done a book called the *Servants of India*, which is all about the domestic servants who come and go away, who come and cheat you and that kind of thing. Penguin has published it. Now I want to write a book on the doctors of India, how they give you pills, how patients still die, it doesn't work.

Karan Thapar: An exposé on the doctors of India?

R.K. Laxman: Yes, I think doctors don't know anything.

Karan Thapar: So this is the next big thing for R.K. Laxman?

R.K. Laxman: I hope I get well soon enough to sit and draw, it is very tiring.

Karan Thapar: Well on behalf of all those who know and love your cartoons we look forward greatly to this book. Mr Laxman, thank you very much.

R.K. Laxman: Thank you for a wonderful meeting. I hope you are satisfied.

Karan Thapar: Enormously.

R.K. Laxman: I am glad to hear that.

This interview was telecast on 7 August 2002.

R.K. Laxman still draws cartoons regularly for the Times of India. *In 2005 he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan.*

Raghu Rai

Out of a billion Indians there are barely a handful who dominate their profession the way my guest today does. His name is synonymous with photography. So how has he done it, and much more importantly, what is he like? Well here he is himself to answer those question,s as I introduce you to India's best-known photographer, Raghu Rai.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Raghu. Let's start with yourself and come to your photography later on. You were born in a family with three brothers and six sisters. Was childhood a bit of a crowd?

Raghu Rai: Well, my father had a problem in the family planning department. So that's the way it went, but it was great fun to have so many brothers and sisters.

Karan Thapar: He was also very imaginative with the names he gave your siblings. I gather each of you has a very unusual name.

Raghu Rai: Yes, that is also because each time you feel something when the baby's born and the names are given accordingly. So everything has to be responded to with a bit of sensitivity, and not everything planned in a way like Lal Singh and Ram Singh.

Karan Thapar: But did he make it confusing for the family, to remember the names Daddy's given everyone?

Raghu Rai: That's true.

Karan Thapar: Now, he was working with the irrigation department and you spent a lot of time travelling around the country with him. What sort of childhood did you have?

Raghu Rai: Along with the department of canals. So it was like living with nature. Otherwise I can say my childhood was very normal and simple, but the only redeeming factor was that we were closer to nature, to rivers, to canals, and every now and then dived into canals and rivers. New depths to explore and have fun.

Karan Thapar: Was your idea of beauty awakened at that time? Was it as a child that you had this mind's eye of yours, and a sense of what beauty really is?

Raghu Rai: No, at that early age you cannot analyse and think like that. You just live it, and that's the best part of being a child, that you just go on living and enjoying it, and later, maybe at this age you can say, 'Yes, it did help.'

Karan Thapar: Were you a happy child? Was it a happy childhood?

Raghu Rai: Well, not really happy, but nothing really special, nothing extraordinary to talk about.

Karan Thapar: Now, your father had one great dream. He wanted you to be an engineer and in fact you even trained to be one. But I gather you hated it.

Raghu Rai: Yes, because doing a 10 to 5 job with the government was awful; at that time those were the openings, in the early 1970s, and I worked with the government for a year, and luckily that job was meant only for a year. And then I ran from Firozpur in Punjab, where my father was positioned, where I got this job. I came to Delhi and then I said—

Karan Thapar: What did he say when you chucked up this job and ran away? Was he upset or did he just take it in his stride?

Raghu Rai: Well, when I also started taking pictures, if somebody asked him, 'How many sons do you have?' He'd say, 'I had four sons, two have gone.'

Karan Thapar: So he cut the two of you out, because both of you'd become photographers?

Raghu Rai: Yes.

Karan Thapar: He didn't approve of photography as a profession?

Raghu Rai: No, not at all. Not in the beginning; but later he realized that there was so much that the guy was putting in and my brother was doing well, I'd started doing well. So, then he realized that there is something to it.

Karan Thapar: That of course was a little later on. But when you ran away from Firozpur and went all the way to Delhi, how did you end up as a photographer? Was it in fact you brother Paul's influence, or was it something else?

Raghu Rai: Yes, living with him for those few years when every friend of his came with cameras, with photographs and he had bags full of equipment, lenses, films, magazines, but no clothes to wear—he was that kind of mad guy—it was a learning experience.

Karan Thapar: All his money went into the cameras?

Raghu Rai: Yes, yes. And I used to wonder, 'This is a crazy bunch, a crazy lot; all the time they talk about photography.' So one day, just for the sake of fun I said, 'Let me also take some pictures, not to become a photographer, but just to have fun.' So this is how it started.

Karan Thapar: In fact, it wasn't just as simple as that, because one of the first photographs you took ended up as a half page spread in the *London Times*. That's quite an amazing way to start your career!

Raghu Rai: Yes, that was very encouraging, very exciting for me because, you know, I took those pictures for the first time with a small Agfa camera.

Karan Thapar: The kind of thing people have as toys?

Raghu Rai: Yes, absolutely. Nobody will think you're serious with that kind of a camera. But it so happened, the picture that I took, without being conscious about the fact that I was taking a picture of any great importance, my brother saw that picture and he said, 'Wow, this is very good.' And so I also laughed and I said yes. So he said, 'I'm sending a packet to *London Times*.'

Karan Thapar: What did you say?

Raghu Rai: I didn't know. I said, 'Yes, let's send it.'

Karan Thapar: Did you know that your picture was as good as your brother thought it was?

Raghu Rai: It looked cute; it was of a baby donkey standing still and looking so innocent and stupid.

Karan Thapar: In fact, you make it sound very simple, but I gather you had to chase the donkey quite a bit before he agreed to pose for you.

Raghu Rai: Yes, you see, I went to this village with my brother's friends, taking pictures on a picture spree, as they used to call it. And I saw this baby donkey, looking very sweet. I didn't have any big telephoto lens to photograph him from a distance. So I had this small camera, I was trying to get closer, the baby donkey started running and I started chasing him. And all those children in the village, they started laughing. The more they

laughed, the more I ran, just to have fun with the situation. And then the baby donkey got exhausted and stood there for me.

Karan Thapar: And when the picture finally appeared as a half page spread in the *London Times*, was that a big moment of joy?

Raghu Rai: Yes, it was, it was a good feeling. But I must tell you that I'm not the kind who will hang on to such moments of recognition.

Karan Thapar: But you've had so many of them. You can't possibly hang on to them. They've come literally one after the other in your career, haven't they?

Raghu Rai: Well, yes, with God's grace things have been happening, but yet, it's the ability to move on is what matters.

Karan Thapar: Distancing yourself from achievement is the way to keep your balance.

Raghu Rai: Yes.

Karan Thapar: You know, you've had an amazing career since then. You've had a number of prestigious jobs, but the very first job as the Chief Photographer at the *Statesman* came your way when you were just twenty-four. Were you surprised by your success?

Raghu Rai: No, not really.

Karan Thapar: You mean you were expecting it?

Raghu Rai: No, I had this madness that I can take good pictures without much equipment; honestly, today if I look back, I can tell you that I did know exactly.

Karan Thapar: You were very confident about yourself?

Raghu Rai: Yes and about what to do. But, seeing, looking at photography magazines, looking at the great

photographers' work, the kind of pictures they've done, it's really easy to say, 'Yes, even you can do it.' And that feeling kept me going through the challenge that I had during that time in early 1970s. I accepted, and I said, 'Let's go on and see what happens.'

Karan Thapar: Your job at the *Statesman* was very interesting because in a sense your brother was Chief Photographer at the *Indian Express* at the same time. And I gather one of your close colleagues who gave you your first job was the Chief Photographer at the *Hindustan Times*.

Raghu Rai: Yes.

Karan Thapar: So did the three of you grow up as rivals in a sense?

Raghu Rai: Absolute rivals. You know when we would meet in the field, we'd look at each other and keep a watch on each other, who was doing what. At the end of the day the best picture is what you get to see the next morning. So it was a lot of fun, there were those days when I had the best picture. There were days when Paul was giving the best picture, or Kishor Parekh. So you know within a few months, I was competing with them. And I used to say, 'Baby, we meet again.' But again, with a very innocent feeling. Without knowing much about anything in the world, photography and photo-journalism was instinctive. But it was working.

Karan Thapar: And you also liked having the best picture when it was yours, didn't you? Now, you went on in 1980 to become the first ever Picture Editor in *India Today*. And you introduced a concept that today everyone thinks is normal, the photo essay. But at the time, was it a very unusual thing to do?

Raghu Rai: No, not really, because in today's world everyone knows of picture essays from *Life* magazine, or *Look* magazine.

Karan Thapar: But not in India.

Raghu Rai: Not in India, but surely people who are into this business know what a strong picture essay means. And the fact was that when I joined *India Today* with Aroon Purie I had such an equation where we could do anything, and change anything from the layout, from typography, from anything to anything.

Karan Thapar: He gave you that leeway.

Raghu Rai: Yes. No, he didn't give it to me. I took it. Nobody gives it to you. You have to be your professional, strong, honest self to be there at all times. And then you get it.

Karan Thapar: Are you a very strong willed, determined person?

Raghu Rai: Most of the time.

Karan Thapar: Do you get what you want?

Raghu Rai: It comes.

Karan Thapar: It comes. You don't even have to ask for it?

Raghu Rai: No, you have to work for it. If you are at it all the time, with all the mind, spirit and energy, then nature also looks at you and says, 'Well, this child has been there. Give it to him.'

Karan Thapar: Do you believe in God? Do you believe in the fact that if you work hard you'll get your just reward?

Raghu Rai: Most of the time, yes. And God, or supernatural energies or whatever you call them, they're there to help everybody. And that's why we get connected.

Karan Thapar: You know, in your life, you've had a series of awards, but looking back would you say that the Padma Shri which you got when you were just twenty-nine was, in a sense, the sweetest of them all?

Raghu Rai: Yes, in the sense that that was the first time in India that they recognized a photographer. That was very precious to me. Especially because photography in India is what it is with photographers being treated as illustrators or to record a picture of this happening or that event.

Karan Thapar: They didn't have the celebrity status that they do today.

Raghu Rai: Not only that, the participation a photographer should have in a newspaper or a magazine is not recognized. Usually I interpret a page of text as brickwork. And a great picture, a sensitive moment captured, of a situation, political or social, is a window opening to the world, which connects you to the moment.

Karan Thapar: But that recognition of the photographer, and the window that he opens didn't exist in the '60s and the '70s when you first entered the profession?

Raghu Rai: No. I remember when I joined the *Statesman*, one of my news editors, a very nice man, would tell me, 'Raghu, there's this story we want to do. There is a space for two column, maybe vertical, or three column horizontal.' Which means that all your enthusiasm and excitement gets killed when you know that it was going to be published in this size. And I started from there; I'd go to the location, invest myself completely into it, capture whatever I could, come back, and then make a print of this size. And he'd—his name was Sharmaji—look at it, and

he'd say, 'Raghu, you've got such a big print!' And I would say, 'Sharmaji, take a look at the picture.' So he'd look at the photograph and he'd say, 'Yes, it's a nice photograph. So shall we make it into four columns?' I'd say, 'Sharmaji, this is six column size print, you know. Maybe you can make it into five columns.' So this is how it'd be.

Karan Thapar: So every picture would start with a negation?

Raghu Rai: There were days when in the *Statesman* I used to have a half page, or even a full page photograph, one photograph, which has never happened in Indian newspapers or magazines.

Karan Thapar: Today, of course, Indian newspapers, particularly those like *Delhi Times* and *HT City* find a lot of room for photographs. But do you approve of those opportunities or do you think that somehow what they're giving us is kitsch?

Raghu Rai: Precisely, it is more of the entertainment level of photography, which is colourful, which is of film stars, which is of models, which is of people who are doing all kinds of things ... today's celebrities ...

Karan Thapar: It's not actually art.

Raghu Rai: You see, when a sensitive moment, or a powerful photograph is printed in this size, it makes you hold your breath or you drop a heartbeat, then it's meaningful. Otherwise, its all *rang birangi*, they colour the youth everywhere.

Karan Thapar: Raghu, let's take a break, and I want to come back in Part II and talk about those photographs that make you drop a heartbeat and ask you a little bit more about what they really mean to you. We'll be back in a moment's time. Don't go away.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is the photographer Raghu Rai. Raghu, let's talk about your photography. In this wonderful little book, *Raghu Rai in His Own Words*, you write, 'When I'm told people can distinguish my work from others', it isn't very good.' Why? I thought uniqueness was the real distinctiveness that made a good photographer.

Raghu Rai: Yes, to begin with, it is supposed to be good. But when you've lived enough, photographed enough, then you don't want your stamp, your attitude, your style to become so known and conscious that people can say, 'Yes, this is Raghu Rai.' It should be like life itself.

Karan Thapar: Unpredictability is the essence of it all?

Raghu Rai: Absolutely. That's the magic. It keeps changing all the time.

Karan Thapar: In fact you write something about that too. You say, 'I like my pictures to be like life itself. Like a slice of life that has been captured, which if released, starts living again.'

Raghu Rai: You see, that's talking about energy. Photography has a very specific purpose, compared to painting or any other art form. And when we try to photograph moments from life, and when we give them back to life, they should relate to life, the ongoing affairs of life, and the energies of life that you haven't composed, you haven't stopped, you haven't manipulated. It should be so natural, so spontaneous that it should have its own magic.

Karan Thapar: Tell me something. Is a Raghu Rai photograph a factual record or is it a personal comment?

Raghu Rai: To begin with, it's a factual record, which makes a comment and a statement of its own kind.

Karan Thapar: Is a Raghu Rai photograph difficult to understand?

Raghu Rai: No. Any powerful, sensitive image has complexities, it is about the complexity of life, about layers and layers of things happening in a situation. My earlier work which I did even with *India Today* and with the *Statesman* was very physical, bold, strong, graphic. And it was, I'd say, visually more entertaining.

Karan Thapar: And your later work?

Raghu Rai: It has subtleties and intensities and a kind of knitting of life that goes on within itself.

Karan Thapar: So it's intellectually more demanding?

Raghu Rai: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Which means that the viewer takes out of it what he puts in?

Raghu Rai: Yes, absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Is this what you mean when you say that, 'Photography is like good music. People can respond to it without analysing it, but those who analyse will respond deeper'?

Raghu Rai: No, you see, it's not necessary for those who can analyse to also respond deeper. There are people, viewers, who can take one look at things and really travel into every inch of space that they experience. And they may not even put it into words. And there are the people who can analyze and talk about it. But in both the cases, it can be equally powerful. Whereas these days the trend is, even in cinemas, or in serials on TV, most programmes, everything, newspapers, magazines, it's a level. Everything has been brought down to a level of

entertainment, visual entertainment. Or even music, the bulk of Indian music which is being dubbed in that western beat, dham dham dham dham, it becomes an aggression on our sensibilities. And we feel very good about it, this newness in Indian music, which is very meaningless to me.

Karan Thapar: So is a Raghu Rai picture something to be seen and felt through the heart, or understood through the head? Or does it depend upon the mood of the viewer?

Raghu Rai: Both. But again, first of all, I'd like to say that please don't say 'a Raghu Rai picture', because honestly, when I do my work I do it with a lot of sensitivity and responsibility. But once it's done, it's done and over with. I don't carry my work like this.

Karan Thapar: You deliberately distance yourself.

Raghu Rai: Yes. And Raghu Rai's work is no big deal for me. But when I'm doing it it's very precious.

Karan Thapar: Of all the great subjects that you've tackled in your career, perhaps the most complicated seems to have been Indira Gandhi.

Raghu Rai: And Mother Teresa.

Karan Thapar: And Mother Teresa.

Raghu Rai: Yes, two different individuals altogether.

Karan Thapar: How difficult were they, and how much of the interest for you lay in the difficulty?

Raghu Rai: Well, with Mrs Gandhi, during those years things were more accessible. We had access to almost any situation. And we could demand things from Mrs Gandhi actually.

Karan Thapar: So they didn't put up barriers like the Prime Ministers of today do.

Raghu Rai: Not at all. And there were not so many photographers, crowding each situation where they are pushing and pulling each other. One had the access. You could even tell the security people off or tell the Prime Minister, 'Look, Prime Minister, your security is bothering us.' And she would make sure that they moved aside.

Karan Thapar: Was she conscious of the fact that she was being photographed?

Raghu Rai: Absolutely. Absolutely. Every moment. I remember once when I had a special appointment with her, I was photographing during the day and she said in the afternoon that, 'You come after two hours. I need to have a break.' I said, 'All right.' So in the afternoon when I went there, she was so exhausted, she was standing, holding onto a door like this. And me, like a silly guy, I walked in without my camera on. And by the time I took my camera there, she had come down.

Karan Thapar: But you got another lovely picture of her, very early in her Prime Minister-ship. It's a gorgeous photograph of Mrs Gandhi bending down to straighten her sari, peeking out of the window or the door, waiting for a guest to arrive. Was that a moment that happened just by accident or good luck, or were you in a strange way waiting for it?

Raghu Rai: With each situation you have to be alert and responsible, and looking for something different in every situation. Otherwise, these meeting of dignitaries and VIPs tend to be very boring. So, all of us we were already inside her room and at 4 p.m. she was to come in. Out of curiosity she did this and looked out, and that was the moment.

Karan Thapar: So there's a sixth sense a photographer has to keep switched on all the time.

Raghu Rai: Why call it the sixth sense? If we remain alert, we can do enough. Sixth sense is a much later thing.

Karan Thapar: Right at the other end of her career, you got another picture, which in a sense symbolized for millions of people her fall from grace—a sweeper clearing into the dustbin posters of Indira Gandhi. You'd been very close to her up to that point. Did it hurt you when you took that?

Raghu Rai: Basically, my responsibility, as an honest, responsible photojournalist was to capture the truth of the moment. There were days when people worshipped her, touched her feet. They treated her like a goddess. And that day, after the Emergency, when they had the elections, she lost it. And that was my responsibility, to show it symbolically that she was not the Prime Minister any more.

Karan Thapar: To whom, as a photographer, do you owe your loyalty? To whom do you consider yourself accountable?

Raghu Rai: To the situations.

Karan Thapar: So truth, in a sense, is your God.

Raghu Rai: Absolutely. And even when she declared the Emergency, we all got together against her. And yet, it was every writer, photographer, everyone's responsibility that each time you walk into a situation where Mrs Gandhi is going to be there, even if you hate her, you have to look at the situation all over again. And honestly, today when I look back, though we stood against Mrs Gandhi, when we look at today's politicians and today's governments, it's sad to say that I feel she was much better.

Karan Thapar: So for all her faults, she was a better person.

Raghu Rai: Absolutely. On many levels, and the level of corruption and everything was different.

Karan Thapar: You carry some fondness for her in your heart, don't you?

Raghu Rai: No, you have to be honest. When you look at what you're getting today, you feel sad. So you remember some old moments and old days.

Karan Thapar: As you take a span of your career, and it's gone on over forty years, there's a certain sadness because the quality of the politicians that you sometimes had preferred is diminishing in front of your eyes.

Raghu Rai: Yes, even Vajpayee saheb, our present Prime Minister—there were days when we used to go to listen to him, and his sense of humour, and his vision about things, when he was such a great orator. But we don't see that in the Prime Minister any more.

Karan Thapar: Raghu Rai, a pleasure getting to know you.

Raghu Rai: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 10 July 2002.

A retrospective of Raghu Rai's photographs will be published by Penguin India in 2006.

Ratan Tata

My guest today is synonymous with big business and success. Since the 1990s, when he took over as chairman of his companies, profits and turnover have increased by over 300 per cent—a record that could be the envy of most businessmen. But what is he himself like? What makes him tick? Well, let's see if he tells us as I introduce you to Ratan Tata.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme.

Ratan Tata: Thank you.

Karan Thapar: You were born in British India at a time when most people didn't realize that perhaps independence was imminent. What sort of memories of childhood do you have of that period?

Ratan Tata: Not very many. I recall some of the riots at the time of the independence movement. My family home is across the street from Azad Maidan, which was the scene of many meetings and many lathi charges. And I remember watching them from our balcony. As a young kid I wanted India to be free. And I remember as kids we used to pour sugar in the petrol tanks of motorcycles that belonged to the British MPs whenever we could.

Karan Thapar: So as a little kid, Ratan Tata was busy spoiling all the British cars he could find? (*Chuckles*)

Ratan Tata: Not all the British cars, unfortunately, but several of them. (*Chuckles*)

Karan Thapar: Now, your parents separated when you were just seven. At that age was that a traumatic experience?

Ratan Tata: Yes it was. But we had a close-knit family and we overcame that. Both my brother and I had a hard time in school.

Karan Thapar: Because they teased you?

Ratan Tata: They teased us. It wasn't a common event in those days. So we had to undergo that. I became sensitized to it, in a manner of speaking.

Karan Thapar: You had to learn to develop a thick skin?

Ratan Tata: Well, I became very sensitive to that.

Karan Thapar: You grew very close to your grandmother, Lady Tata. Would you say that she was a very dominant influence while you were growing up?

Ratan Tata: I was very close to her. She was instrumental in my having her husband's name when I was born. And she's very much the person that I grew up with, as far as I can remember.

Karan Thapar: Did she spoil you? Was she indulgent?

Ratan Tata: She was indulgent. But she never spoilt one. She was very proper. She was very demanding. She had tremendous values and a tremendous sense of what was right or wrong. And she had enormous dignity, which she was keen that everybody around her, including herself, maintained. So I grew up with those kinds of standards. And personally I don't think she spoilt me. Other people may think she spoilt me. (*Chuckles*)

Karan Thapar: I know she was a grand lady in her own ways. She had this amazingly large car that used to be sent to school to pick you up. But it made you cringe at times, didn't it?

Ratan Tata: Yes. It didn't always come. It came from time to time. And, yes, we did cringe. It was a car where the driver sat in an open area. You sat in an enclosed area. It was high. It had huge wheels with tiny tyres and spokes. It was old fashioned even in those days. And whenever it came I'd almost prefer not to be seen in it and would rather walk home.

Karan Thapar: Those were the days when, I presume, when the Tatas lived in grand style. For those were times when you were also very close to the British, were you not, through your grandmother?

Ratan Tata: Yes, she was. She and Sir Ratan Tata were very close to Queen Mary and King George V. That was part of her life. It certainly wasn't part of mine.

Karan Thapar: In your late teens you went to Cornell. You got a degree in architecture and structural engineering. But it wasn't something that your father really wanted you to do, was it?

Ratan Tata: My father had wanted me to go to England. He wanted me to be a Chartered Accountant, as he had been. And I was the rebel who wanted to go to the United States and I wanted to study architectural engineering. So he didn't like it.

Karan Thapar: Did you have a problem with him over this?

Ratan Tata: No.

Karan Thapar: He accepted your decision.

Ratan Tata: Well, I did it anyway. (*Laughs*)

Karan Thapar: What was Cornell like? I mean you were a rich Indian. And suddenly you were in a big American university where the name Tata probably meant nothing.

Ratan Tata: No. I was just one of twenty thousand students. Believe me, in those days when an Indian went abroad the RBI gave you a very meagre allowance. So I was not a rich Indian. I was a struggling student at that time wondering would I make it to the end of the month before my next cheque came. And quite frankly, the thing about Cornell was that it was so big and you were so anonymous and you knew no one. And you were in a new culture. It was scary for the first few months.

Karan Thapar: I gather you took to Cornell because afterwards you stayed on in America. And I gather you were not too keen on coming back to India, at least initially?

Ratan Tata: I loved America and still do. I feel very much at home there. And I had a good job, an exciting job, in a city I loved—Los Angeles. And yes, I had no intention of coming back.

Karan Thapar: What was it that drew you to America? The people, the culture, or just the sense of freedom to be yourself?

Ratan Tata: It's strange you should ask me that. I don't know what drew me to America. But ever since I was a kid, long before I ever went there the first time, I'd decided to go there.

Karan Thapar: So that was a dream fulfilled.

Ratan Tata: Yes. And destiny.

Karan Thapar: So what brought you back?

Ratan Tāta: My grandmother brought me back. She was old. She was ailing. And she wanted to see me again. And she appealed to me. In those days, even the telephone calls were hard. You know, you had to book a call. And they weren't an everyday thing. She appealed to me and that touched me. So I went back.

Karan Thapar: In the end the bond with your grandmother was stronger than the attraction to America?

Ratan Tata: Well, I came back not necessarily thinking I'd live the rest of my life here. I just came back because she wanted me back.

Karan Thapar: Within fifteen days of your return you found yourself bundled off to Jamshedpur, beginning a new career in the Tatas. And it wasn't a great job that they sent you to do, was it?

Ratan Tata: No, it was an endless training programme. In hindsight a very useful one. But at that time it seemed like a terrible waste of time.

Karan Thapar: They literally made you begin on the shop floor.

Ratan Tata: Yes, which was worthwhile.

Karan Thapar: And you lived in the hostel with all the other apprentices?

Ratan Tata: Yeah.

Karan Thapar: They wouldn't even let you take your car. But they permitted a bicycle.

Ratan Tata: They permitted a bicycle. I was rather offended when I was told that you can't take your car but you can take a bicycle. Coming from Los Angeles I didn't see how anybody had the right to tell you what to do. So I didn't get a bicycle and I walked.

Karan Thapar: So the rebel was there again?

Ratan Tata: Yes.

Karan Thapar: Were there times when you said, 'What on earth am I doing here? Why am I not back in America?'

Ratan Tata: Yes, a couple of times. And I did almost go back.

Karan Thapar: You seriously thought that you are going to throw it in and go back?

Ratan Tata: Oh, yes!

Karan Thapar: What kept you on?

Ratan Tata: (*Long pause*) It's hard to say. A couple of times I came very close to going back. And then I didn't. I can't explain that. It was just, I think, something that happened here. One of the things that happened that kept me back was being asked to take over Telco. And it seemed like a challenge.

Karan Thapar: That was 1971.

Ratan Tata: That's right. That was another moment when I was thinking of going back.

Karan Thapar: You say it was a like a challenge. It was a loss-making company at that time and presumably no one else in the Tata Group wanted to take over. Was it the challenge that attracted you or was it suddenly the feeling that you had a role to perform and that you were made to belong?

Ratan Tata: No, it was the challenge. It was an industry that was exciting. The electronic industry in those days was groundbreaking and even making radios and TV sets was challenging and exciting. And it was a company filled with young people. Above all it was an opportunity to dig your teeth into something.

Karan Thapar: And you were looking forward to that?

Ratan Tata: I really was. I was wasting away earlier.

Karan Thapar: Now, during those bleak days at Jamshedpur, you got to know J.R.D. Tata really well. What attracted you to each other?

Ratan Tata: We had one very common and very private bond—our common love for flying. He was a

pilot, I was a pilot. His flying was much more exciting than mine because in his day it was open-cockpit, helmet-flying in biplanes. In my time it was different. But we had that common bond and that really pulled us together. He asked me to form a flying club in Jamshedpur which I did. And thereafter I think we really became quite close.

Karan Thapar: Did you, in a sense, become for him the son he never had?

Ratan Tata: No, I don't believe that that would be true. I was very close to him, very fond of him. And I think he was fond of me. But it was an office-based relationship. Very seldom at home. But still very close, very private. Very confiding. And the wonderful thing was that in many ways though I was not so much the son that he never had, but in many ways he was a father—a second father to me. I could share much more with him than I could sometimes with my own father.

Karan Thapar: So he actually fulfilled the need that you felt?

Ratan Tata: Yes.

Karan Thapar: And in 1991 he announced that he wanted you to succeed him as the chairman of the Tata Group. How did he break that news to you? Do you remember that moment?

Ratan Tata: Yes I do. It was in a very strange way. We were in Jamshedpur on a visit. I had to go to Stuttgart for a meeting with Mercedes. When I came back I heard he'd had a mild heart attack and he was in the hospital in Bombay. I called on him everyday while he was there. On a particular Monday he was back in the office. I went to see him. He had this habit, when you walked in he'd say, 'Well, what's new?' And I said, 'J,

there's nothing new. I just saw you on Friday.' And he said, 'Well, I have something new for you. I've decided to step down and name you my successor.'

Karan Thapar: Were you surprised?

Ratan Tata: Very surprised.

Karan Thapar: You had absolutely no inkling.

Ratan Tata: Well, he'd often talked of it. But no, it came very abruptly. And then what followed it was even more amazing and amusing from J. He said, 'Don't say anything about it now. I've to pick an auspicious day to do it.' And J was not a superstitious person. He didn't believe in these kinds of things. So I don't know what had come over him. So we stayed quiet. And at an appropriate Board Meeting he brought this up.

Karan Thapar: And it was as much of a shock to the rest of the board members as it was to you?

Ratan Tata: No, he'd spoken to each one of them.

Karan Thapar: He'd briefed them up?

Ratan Tata: Yes.

Karan Thapar: But did you find out what this auspicious day was that he'd spoken of?

Ratan Tata: No, I never did.

Karan Thapar: That remains a secret he took with him.

Ratan Tata: Yes, I guess so.

Karan Thapar: Let's take a break there. In Part II I want to come back and talk about the things that have happened since you became *the* Mr Tata. We'll be back in just a couple of moments. Stay with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is Ratan Tata. When you took over as chairman of the Tatas in

1991, your profits were just around 700 crores. Today they're 2,100 crores. Your turnover was 11,000 crores, today it's probably touching about 37,000 crores. Is that a source of pride and satisfaction, or do you see these simply as stepping-stones on an unfinished journey?

Ratan Tata: I'd say it's a bit of both. Of course it's a bit of an issue of pride. It's not any one single person that's made that happen. It's a team that has worked towards whatever the Tatas have done. But it is an unfinished task on the road—a task that I think is a challenging one, because there's so much that's happening in the world around us. And whatever the growth may be, it's still a growth rate that one could seem a little dissatisfied with or a little optimistic of bettering in the coming years.

Karan Thapar: I suppose when you're a businessman you can always earn more. There can always be better profits.

Ratan Tata: Yes. Not only that. There are so many new areas that are emerging, new technologies, new fields of endeavour. And the excitement of entering those fields and growing in them, growing well in them and becoming deeply entrenched in them, is an exciting task.

Karan Thapar: You know, you talk about taking the companies into new fields and taking them into exciting tasks and your colleagues say that perhaps the most important thing that you did was to restructure the organization. It took you several years to do it. But were you doing it simply to assert the hold of the Tatas over what was then a loose confederal empire or was it also to refocus, redirect and give coherence?

Ratan Tata: We needed refocusing and we needed consolidation. And that task is not finished. In fact I'd

say it's barely started. We also needed to have the right to manage. In many of our companies, our financial stake was very low. And it didn't need to be very high in the days of MRTP. But today things are different. And my own personal feeling is that the right to manage comes with a reasonable stake in your company. One can argue that you have no right to manage if you have a two or three percent stake in the company that you run. So it's been a bit of both—we needed to consolidate our businesses and have focus. And we also needed to increase the stake in our companies so that we were rightful managers and promoters.

Karan Thapar: Who's got the moral as well as the practical right to do things.

Ratan Tata: Yes. Yes.

Karan Thapar: But it wasn't always easy, was it? Because there were people—they were called the Titans in those days—who were either resistant or perhaps, as in the case of Russi Modi, even defiant. Were they difficult to handle?

Ratan Tata: They were older and more seasoned members of the management team that J had created over the years. All of them had made tremendous contributions to Indian industry. And they may have had difference of views from mine. And mine was not necessarily the right view. So, yes, there've been disagreements. That's good. There was a great deal of moderation arising out of the experience and maturity of what they had to say.

Karan Thapar: Of course, even afterwards it wasn't always very easy. For instance when you came up with the idea of a private airline in collaboration with Singapore Airlines the market thought you really had a

winner, but for some reason or the other it never really took off. Was it political obstruction that stopped you or was it in fact the ambitions of rival businessmen that tripped you up?

Ratan Tata: I think it was the latter, not the former. We went through three different governments who were, if you might, manoeuvred to take the same view.

Karan Thapar: Were you bitter when it fell apart?

Ratan Tata: No. No.

Karan Thapar: Was it a setback?

Ratan Tata: No, I don't think winning or losing a licence is a setback or a reason to be despondent.

Karan Thapar: Except that when you know that you have a good idea and you know that the market believes you have a winning idea then not to be able to follow it through must be at least disappointing.

Ratan Tata: It's disappointing. Disappointing not because we didn't get it. Disappointing that the system was manoeuvered in a way that this could happen.

Karan Thapar: They say that one of the problems perhaps the Tatas have in handling the Indian system is that you do not grease palms—that you do not *facilitate*. Is that often a burden and a problem just as much as it is something to be proud of?

Ratan Tata: I would like to say first of all that more than anything else one is proud of that. Sometimes it is a problem. The way I look at it, and the way I speak to others, is that I really would like to go to bed at night to wake up in the morning saying that we have not succumbed and yet we've been successful.

Karan Thapar: That is important to you, that when you put your head on your pillow you can do it with your conscience clear?

Ratan Tata: It's very important to me.

Karan Thapar: But what do you say when critics turn around and say that this is also a reason perhaps why you don't grow as fast as you could?

Ratan Tata: It's a fair point. They may be right. I would prefer to live with the knowledge that I have of upholding the values that we have tried to uphold through these years rather than say that I've grown at three times the rate we have.

Karan Thapar: Conscience before profits.

Ratan Tata: (*Pause*) Conscience before profits perhaps. Or profits in a particular way, in a particular form that you can live with, that you can be proud of.

Karan Thapar: Let's talk a little about yourself. Those who know you say that you are very private, you are reserved and perhaps even solitary. Is that so?

Ratan Tata: Perhaps so, yes.

Karan Thapar: Do you ever feel lonely, as a result?

Ratan Tata: Yes, sometimes.

Karan Thapar: And do you welcome it?

Ratan Tata: No. There are times in a job like mine that you welcome being alone. You seldom have time to yourself. And there are times that you do feel lonely.

Karan Thapar: I presume that's when the day's done and you go home—and that's to an empty home.

Ratan Tata: Sometimes. (*Chuckles*) Unfortunately I'm seldom home!

Karan Thapar: Did you never think of getting married?

Ratan Tata: Yes I did. And came close several times.

Karan Thapar: Can I ask what went wrong?

Ratan Tata: Oh! Different things went wrong at different times. Well, the pressure of work or the feeling

that domestic life was secondary to my work life—these were usually the reasons that things didn't work out.

Karan Thapar: Because you said there's always time for this later on.

Ratan Tata: Yes, yes.

Karan Thapar: And today when you suddenly discovered that perhaps there hasn't been time, do you regret not having married?

Ratan Tata: Oh! Many times.

Karan Thapar: Would you still consider getting married?

Ratan Tata: Oh, of course.

Karan Thapar: So you don't think at sixty-three it's too late.

Ratan Tata: I don't think it's too late to do anything. If the right person was there and I had the right feelings, I would certainly do so.

Karan Thapar: Now, you mentioned that one of your great hobbies is flying. Your friends say that you are also a great mimic. But that's not a solitary man's hobby, is it? It's almost a party game.

Ratan Tata: Yes, I suppose so. When I say solitary person or a private person, it isn't that I don't enjoy being with people. In a way, I think, anybody who draws or who tries to capture what they see, is also a mimic. Because they not only see the visuals, they also capture mannerisms and words and the manner in which somebody works. So, in that sense mimicking is very much an easy thing.

Karan Thapar: Did you mimic people all the time when you were with your friends?

Ratan Tata: Oh, all the time. (*Chuckles*)

Karan Thapar: Who are these other people that you mimic?

Ratan Tata: Oh, I'll mimic you when I finish this session.

Karan Thapar: Couldn't you do it just now?

Ratan Tata: No. (*Laughs*)

Karan Thapar: You are sixty-three, or you will be later on this year. Will you retire at sixty-five as the rules of Tata Sons say you should?

Ratan Tata: Yes, from an executive position I will.

Karan Thapar: Will another Tata succeed you?

Ratan Tata: The only other Tata is my stepbrother who is in the company. He is young and he's moving through the organization. I would imagine at some stage there may be another Tata in the organization. Whether it'll be another Tata that succeeds me is for my colleagues to decide.

Karan Thapar: Not something you are going to comment on.

Ratan Tata: No.

Karan Thapar: You won't do what JRD did, which is to nominate his successor and discuss it with the board. Or at least indicate his preference?

Ratan Tata: Well, I think a retiring chairman or a CEO does have a responsibility to express his view. But the choice of the successor I think lies with the board. They're responsible for what happens. And it should not be that an outgoing person nominates or suggests his successor.

Karan Thapar: Mr Tata, thank you very much for a wonderful interview!

Ratan Tata: Thank you! Thank you again.

This interview was telecast on 28 June 2000.

Ratan Tata stepped down from his position as Group CEO in 2003, but continues as chairman of Tata Group.

{14}

Pt. Ravi Shankar

In early April this year (2000) he turned eighty, adding another landmark to a lifetime of achievements. Performer, composer, author, ambassador, he has done more things, met more people, won more prizes than most others. What is he himself like? Judge for yourself as I introduce you to the legendary Ravi Shankar.

Karan Thapar: Congratulations on your eightieth birthday, Panditji.

Ravi Shankar: Thank you.

Karan Thapar: Now, the name Ravi Shankar must be one of the best-known names in India and in the world, and yet Ravi Shankar is not your original name. You were named Ravi after the age of twenty.

Ravi Shankar: That's right. It was actually a Bengali-style name, Ravindra Shankar, and I wanted to sound more Indian, more Sanskritized, so I changed it to Ravi Shankar.

Karan Thapar: You were born in Banares and you spent your earlier years there with your mother. Those were the days when your family didn't have a lot of money.

Ravi Shankar: Yes, we were very badly off in those days.

Karan Thapar: She even had to pawn her jewellery many times.

Ravi Shankar: Yes, she did. And I was the only one who would accompany her in the evenings when she would make a call and she would not want to be recognized. And there was a seth who would call her and her sister and she would either bring a ring or an earring or a sari that she had got as a present from a maharani and that's how she made the money to bring up my three brothers and me.

Karan Thapar: Life was a struggle in those days?

Ravi Shankar: Very much.

Karan Thapar: You were not just the baby of the family, you were also a lonely child in many ways, weren't you?

Ravi Shankar: That's exactly how it was.

Karan Thapar: How do you remember your childhood?

Ravi Shankar: Very alone, till of course I joined the primary school and I had some friends; till then I was very alone and lonely.

Karan Thapar: Did that help you become a musician later on? Or give you a certain inner strength?

Ravi Shankar: I don't know, but there was some influence of my elder brother Rajendra, without any training and looking in the mirror I would be making faces and doing a lot of acting: whatever I saw in theatre and in cinema.

Karan Thapar: In another sense you were your own company and you had to find your own enjoyment from yourself.

Ravi Shankar: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Now I gather you met your father for the first time when you were eight. Remember that first meeting?

Ravi Shankar: Very well; you see he was always away. He was first in Calcutta, then in London, practicing law. He came for the first time, I saw him when I was eight. He was like an Englishman, immaculately dressed, smelling good and I couldn't really relate to him.

Karan Thapar: You write in your autobiography that perhaps in your whole life you haven't spent more than a month with your father.

Ravi Shankar: If I count two days, three days, or a week, it can't perhaps add up to more than two or three months.

Karan Thapar: You also write that as you grew up you began to understand him as a man better but do you hold against him the fact that perhaps he wasn't the best father?

Ravi Shankar: Not now, not any more, because I have come to understand him completely. He was a loner, at the same time he was a seeker, a seeker of knowledge. He could have made millions but he wasn't really interested.

Karan Thapar: As he followed his personal whims and fancies the family suffered.

Ravi Shankar: I guess so, that's how it seems, but he was such a kind man, I know he was sending, in those days, two pounds here or one pound to a student there or to some widowed relative.

Karan Thapar: But as you say in your autobiography, not to your mother.

Ravi Shankar: No.

Karan Thapar: Now, your world changed when you were nine and you met your brother Uday Shankar for the first time and he took you to France. What was it like growing up in Paris in the 1930s?

Ravi Shankar: I can't explain. I was feverish all the time with excitement. Travelling from Banares to Bombay was itself a big excitement, and then on the boat, spending some time in Italy and by train to Paris, the whole thing was like a dream. I was so excited.

Karan Thapar: Was it strange to be the only Indian boy in a French school? Or were you teased because of it?

Ravi Shankar: Absolutely. Of course, they tried ragging me, but after some time, I could run fast, so I would hit them and run and so gradually we became friends.

Karan Thapar: Through your brother I guess you met some of the most remarkable people of the time?

Ravi Shankar: You name it. I mean everyone seemed to be in Paris at that time. Paris was the art capital of the world. So I was so lucky, starting from the fifth class; any famous name that you can take in music or in dancing, actors, writers, everyone I met within that period of almost eight years.

Karan Thapar: How much of today's cosmopolitan Ravi Shankar was actually created in Paris in the 1930s?

Ravi Shankar: I think the basis fwas ormed because at that time I was thrown into the world of music and dance, being in my brother Uday Shankar's troupe. And he had the best musicians ... and I was learning dancing also. We created a style which was a mixture of many Indian dance forms.

Karan Thapar: Unique.

Ravi Shankar: Very unique and it is very Indian because it is I would say almost fifty per cent Kathakali and the rest is little of Manipuri, a little of Kathak, a little of folk dance.

Karan Thapar: You said that you looked up to him?

Ravi Shankar: I always consider him as one of my main gurus.

Karan Thapar: The strange thing is that, Panditji, you only took up music seriously when you were as late as eighteen years old and you attached yourself to Ustad Alauddin Khan who became your guru, but how much of the close bond between the two of you is actually because of your mother who in a sense is said to have looked after him?

Ravi Shankar: Yes, this happened at the end of 1935 actually, when we were boarding a ship from Bombay, and my mother had come to see us off; she had been recently widowed. My father had died two months earlier. I was also feeling very sad. On an impulse she took Baba's, Baba-Alauddin's hand and gave my hand like this and said, 'Please look after him, I may not see him again when he comes back. He has lost his own father very recently.' And then you know Baba-Alauddin howled loudly, he said 'Ma! Ma!' and he said, 'Today I have two sons ... Ravi is my second son.' And that's how it started. That's why he loved me very much and I also had that feeling of a father which I never really had.

Karan Thapar: He took over the role of the father in addition to that of the guru.

Ravi Shankar: Absolutely, much more than a guru.

Karan Thapar: I know you attribute all your skills as a sitar player to the man you call Baba, but the world seems to have forgotten that you are also simultaneously a great composer. For instance, I believe it was at the age of twenty-five that you redid the music of '*Sare jahan se achcha*'. Is that right?

Ravi Shankar: That is right. The original tune was a bit slow, too slow, and almost sad, like for example ...

(sings) ... Like that. Very slow and silly, very base of Rag Kedar.

Karan Thapar: And your version?

Ravi Shankar: And then I did the new version. They wanted a little bit more rhythm and ... *(sings again)*

Karan Thapar: And in fact this is the version that we know today. Now in fact there were a lot of musical compositions that you did. One of the first musical extravaganzas was called melody and rhythm. Nehru was in the audience and I believe he paid you a unique compliment.

Ravi Shankar: Yes, that was way back in '58 in Delhi and I did it through an institution called Triveni. They helped me to produce it. There were no less than a hundred people. There was orchestra, chorus, everything. It was a huge production. There was one number I did that was a lullaby in Hindi. I forget that song, so I cannot sing it but it was very slow, and very sweet with soft light, and it seems we learnt afterwards that some people sitting near the box where Panditji was sitting heard him snoring and they saw Panditji had fallen asleep.

Karan Thapar: Music had lulled him to sleep.

Ravi Shankar: That, and also he was very tired. Of course, you wouldn't believe, after the curtain came down, unlike in all other items where there was tremendous applause, in this there was no applause at all. And we were wondering at that time, and we heard the explanation later. People at that time, the whole nation loved him so much that they didn't want to clap and disturb his sleep. That was so sweet I think.

Karan Thapar: There were some, what you can call musical experiments you did, pieces with Yehudi Menuhin

or with Zubin Mehta. In your opinion how important are they?

Ravi Shankar: They are very important because that gave me an opportunity to do many things that were inside me and I was getting the best people to work with and especially a person like Yehudi Menuhin, I respected him and loved him so much.

Karan Thapar: But they criticized you, the critics, the press said you were cheapening and commercializing the Indian traditions. Did that hurt?

Ravi Shankar: No, mostly in our country we pass remarks without realizing what we are saying. At that time I think it was something new and especially me being a classical musician they thought I was doing something wrong. Actually I was not playing jazz, I was not playing Beethoven on the sitar. I actually composed the things in basic ragas; just the performers were not Indians.

Karan Thapar: Let's take a break and we will come back in the second part and talk about some of the interesting people you have met and the role that they have played in your life. We'll come back in a couple of minutes, stay with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back, my guest is the legendary Ravi Shankar. Panditji, let us talk about some of the interesting people that you have met. For instance in 1966 you met George Harrison and a whole new world opened up for you. How did you get to know each other?

Ravi Shankar: It was a chance meeting in a party and from the very beginning something clicked. He was so different from any other young musician in the pop world that I have known later.

Karan Thapar: You were in a sense attracted to each other?

Ravi Shankar: Yes, because he started asking me questions about music, about philosophy and I found him to be so curious and at the same time so sincere. And that's how it started.

Karan Thapar: There was this amazing visit to Bombay that you tried to keep a secret and you went to great lengths and the press found out about it.

Ravi Shankar: Yes and then there was such a hullabaloo after that, my God! We were in the Taj in a suite and then within an hour it was known that he was here; he had kept it quiet and tried to be incognito but someone recognized him. There were almost two thousand boys and girls shouting 'George, George, Ravi Shankar please bring George' and then it became very difficult. The next day I took him to Kashmir. In those days it was very peaceful and lovely.

Karan Thapar: You have known each other for nearly thirty-five years. How closely?

Ravi Shankar: I would say that he's like my son and he adores me and I have the same feelings. We are the best of friends. He is very funny and I pun a lot. I am not a pundit because I pun but that is something very natural with me when I am in the mood. And with him it always happens, he is always joking, he is full of jokes and puns.

Karan Thapar: During the years that you were close to him you became in a sense almost a pop idol and you were part of the Concert for Bangladesh, you were part of the Woodstock festival, but I gather that in spite of the fact that they catapulted you to stardom you hated those concerts.

Ravi Shankar: So much trash, so much violence ... and it was raining and it was all mud, and half a million people, I was reminded of—

Karan Thapar: Water buffaloes?

Ravi Shankar: Water buffaloes, sorry, that's how I saw everyone you know. They enjoyed all the songs completely and I was really sorry that I was playing there but I couldn't do anything.

Karan Thapar: One of the other great influences in your life, this time not from the world of music, was a famous spiritual leader. Sai Baba. What role did he play? Do you remember how you met him?

Ravi Shankar: From my childhood I was always interested in these yogis and I had met a few others like Ma Anandamayi, but Sai Baba came much earlier in my life at a very difficult time when I was absolutely down.

Karan Thapar: Contemplating suicide, I believe.

Ravi Shankar: I nearly did, exactly. And he walked into my house with a pitcher wanting to go to the bathroom or something and that's how it started and I found him to be so radiant, full of power and so removed from all the bad things that I was going through at that time, everything started changing miraculously; I was getting so many programmes and so many offers for jobs and everything opened up immediately.

Karan Thapar: Do you think he did it? Do you think somehow he influenced it?

Ravi Shankar: No, call it a coincidence ... but I do believe that he had an influence on me.

Karan Thapar: Do you believe in God, in faith?

Ravi Shankar: Absolutely, absolutely. But I am not a fundamentalist or a ritualist. I feel equally devout when I

go to a church. I love the feeling of any temple of God anywhere, and I do very much believe in God.

Karan Thapar: Well Panditji, let's talk a little bit about yourself. You write in your autobiography and I'll quote, 'I have always been very attracted to women.' Are you what they call in this world a romantic?

Ravi Shankar: I guess so, you can say that. That has always been one of the very strong forces in my life.

Karan Thapar: In your life and in particular in your attitude toward women and love people have said that you have defied conventional morality. Has that been deliberate or is that just the way things have worked out?

Ravi Shankar: Unfortunately that is how it has worked out. I am not a believer in love just for the sake of a physical thing you know; as you have said, a romantic yes,

Karan Thapar: Not a sensualist?

Ravi Shankar: Not *(laughs)* so. Whatever happened I had to face consequences.

Karan Thapar: People who read your autobiography said that he has written about his two marriages and his love affairs with remarkable candour. Are you deliberately telling the story as you see it? In other words are you putting the record straight as they say?

Ravi Shankar: I tried my level best up to a point, by not saying many things which would hurt some people. And neither did I want to make this book a sensational book to sell. So keeping this barrier in mind it was a difficult job, believe me.

Karan Thapar: But you did want to tell the truth as you know it?

Ravi Shankar: As much as possible, yes.

Karan Thapar: It was important to you that you did it?

Ravi Shankar: Absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Although in your book and in your conversations you are remarkably candid and frank, there was a period in the '80s where you yourself admit that you suddenly became worried about what the world would say.

Ravi Shankar: Yes, I went through that because constantly I felt, it might sound too high-handed, but there is so much of hypocrisy here. People would do a thing but it is always covered, you are always criticized and that thing always bothered me, and I didn't feel that was necessary, but I went through this period.

Karan Thapar: Did this period coincide with when you were in love with your present wife Sukanya but not actually able to formally marry her? You had a daughter Anushka, but you weren't able to admit it?

Ravi Shankar: Yes, it was a mess at that time. I had so many relationships I didn't know what to do and I went through a very difficult time.

Karan Thapar: Looking back on that time, because it is all over, do you feel you lacked courage or do you think you came under the influence of possessive friends who gave you the wrong advice?

Ravi Shankar: Both. Wrong advice and I was really too concerned about what people will say. That is a big thing in our country.

Karan Thapar: You were worried that you were in love with someone thirty-four years younger than you and people would snap back upon you.

Ravi Shankar: I had no hesitations till something snapped in me and then I said, 'What the hell, enough is enough,' and then I decided.

Karan Thapar: Quite right, and when you decided I gather you announced it to the press before you told your wife Sukanya. It came as a surprise to her.

Ravi Shankar: Almost that.

Karan Thapar: So the playfulness has remained with you right to the end?

Ravi Shankar: I don't know but that's what felt right and I have felt the same since then.

Karan Thapar: There is another sentence in your autobiography that intrigues me. I want to quote you. It says, 'I tell you with utter frankness that I really could have become great if I was not such a pleasure-lover and so disorganized and idle by nature.' What is it that you feel you have failed to reach?

Ravi Shankar: Well it is again the truth because I had so much energy and I do feel that I did not work that much on the sitar. My whole energy was divided so much. I loved to read a lot, I loved to compose and then of course the romantic pursuits were there and all that took so much time that I now sometimes think that maybe I should have channelized my energy more in the direction of music. Especially when I think of music I feel I could have been a better player.

Karan Thapar: Are you telling me Panditji, that a man the world admires today as he becomes eighty regrets that he hasn't achieved everything that he could have?

Ravi Shankar: Sadly it's true. I feel that. Because I know I had put in a lot, and I still do, but you know either circumstances or the energy level does change along with age, you cannot be the same as you were twenty years ago. But I have so much in my head and I would like to do so much still.

Karan Thapar: Panditji, I wish you the very best of luck. Thank you for a lovely evening.

Ravi Shankar: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 12 April 2000.

Pt. Ravi Shankar was awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, in 1999.

Sachin Tendulkar

The world's greatest batsman, he is certainly one of India's most popular heroes even if he is only twenty-six and it's barely been ten years since the world first heard of him. So what is he like and more importantly how does he deal with his incredible fame? To find out, stay with me as I talk to Sachin Tendulkar.

Karan Thapar: Sachin, you were born in April 1973 in a family where most of your brothers and sisters were really much older than you. Were you a spoilt child?

Sachin Tendulkar: To a certain extent, when I was a kid. But the biggest transformation in my life came when I changed my school. Earlier I was in New English School, Bandra, and then I changed to Shardashram English Medium School. That is when the biggest transformation came in my life. I became very serious; earlier I was notorious, and it was hard for my parents, my elder brothers and friends to control me.

Karan Thapar: So, you were a great prankster as a child.

Sachin Tendulkar: I was. I still am.

Karan Thapar: You were a naughty child; you were always getting into trouble.

Sachin Tendulkar: Every day my father used to check my body for I must have fallen somewhere; he could only

do that when I was sleeping. So the moment he touched my elbow, I woke up, and he said, 'Oh, so this is where you got hurt today.' I used to say yes! Then I used to go back to sleep; I was always up to something.

Karan Thapar: Is it true that when you were a young child, maybe five or six in fact, you used to be a bit of a bully as well, and you always liked to be the tough one in the community?

Sachin Tendulkar: I loved fighting, watching lot of Hindi movies; I wanted to be Amitabh Bachchan, it was great fun. We used to have two groups, so another guy looked after B group, I used to look after A group and there used to be quite a lot of fights.

Karan Thapar: And did the A group always win?

Sachin Tendulkar: Most of the times.

Karan Thapar: Okay, but before cricket, in fact, your sporting hairdo had nothing to do with cricket at all; it was a very different person you idolized, wasn't it, when you were young?

Sachin Tendulkar: Well, when I was young, I was the only one in our colony who was backing John McEnroe and the rest of the guys used to back Bjorn Bjorg. So he has always been my hero and he still is.

Karan Thapar: You used to imitate his hair style and apparently wear his kind of headband as well.

Sachin Tendulkar: I used to roam around everywhere like that, with the headband, sweat pants and a tennis racquet.

Karan Thapar: Were you good at tennis in those days?

Sachin Tendulkar: I was too young to make out, but we also used to play hand tennis, because most of the guys didn't have tennis racquets, and that was great fun too, but it was basically for enjoyment.

Karan Thapar: I gather it was your brother Ajit who first spotted your real talent and did a lot to guide and support you, is that right?

Sachin Tendulkar: Absolutely right, because I surely can't imagine what I would have been without my brother. I sure wouldn't have been here, talking to you. He has done everything for me, which a normal brother won't do. He is something more than a brother to me. I find it very hard to express what I feel for him.

Karan Thapar: When you were eleven years old, he introduced you to someone called Ramakant Achrekar. Did you realize at that age, that this man was going to change your life?

Sachin Tendulkar: I was too excited to think about all those things. The first day I went there I was too tense, too nervous. I couldn't bat at all comfortably. He said, okay, this guy is going to take some time, why don't you bring him after six months. So, my brother said, give him another chance, because I have seen him, I know how he plays and this is not the way he plays. Give him another chance, and fortunately my coach agreed, said okay, I'll keep an eye on him for seven days, and I didn't realize that. I was just enjoying my next sessions, and he said, okay, I think he is good. What about changing his school? That is how I changed my school. I was earlier in New English School and I joined Shardashram. That was the turning point of my career, because in the earlier school, there was no cricket.

Karan Thapar: In fact, Mr Achrekar used to make you practice in the nets by using, I believe, a one rupee coin to help you keep your concentration, is that right?

Sachin Tendulkar: It's perfectly true, because I still have those coins. And, whenever I used to get tired—I

used to bat in four nets at a stretch—for the last net, when I was tired, he used to keep a one rupee coin on top of the stumps, and used to say, anyone who gets him out, can take this coin. If nobody gets him out, Sachin is going to take this coin. And it was a big thing to get that coin from our sir. And I used to try my level best not to get out. I lost couple of times, but I have thirteen coins with me.

Karan Thapar: You made a bit of money on the side as well!

Sachin Tendulkar: I did! But I didn't spend it!

Karan Thapar: I gather, it was during this period that two of your closest friends came into your life, Vinod Kambli and Atul Ranade; and they say that Sachin was a big bully, whenever he was on the bus with us, he made sure that we missed ours and went with him.

Sachin Tendulkar: Yes, I was always up to something. When their bus came, I used to say, my mother must be waiting for me, I have to go. So I used to make them remove something from the kit bag, this and that and try and distract them. I used to be quite a bully.

Karan Thapar: And this habit of playing pranks, this habit of teasing and having fun, has it stayed with you even now?

Sachin Tendulkar: It is still there inside me. I use it sometimes, when the time is right. I am the sort of person who would take his time to make friends, and once I have known somebody, I cannot be serious at all. I'm always up to something.

Karan Thapar: I believe that when you played your first match at eleven, it didn't look to anyone as if you would be the star batsman of all times. Despite today's great records, I believe you got out for a duck the first two times?

Sachin Tendulkar: Earlier we used to play in our colonies, just in front of the buildings and I was a decent player there, so all my friends had a lot of expectations and they had come to watch me. I said okay, I am going to show what I can do, today. Went in to bat, first ball, bowled. I came back, my friends asked me what happened? I said the ball kept low, the wicket wasn't so good, and that is how I avoided the conversation. I asked them, where are you going this evening and this and that, let's go and have some bhelpuri, and all that. They said okay, you are playing tomorrow, we'll come again and back you tomorrow. I said it would be fine. The next day also I got out on the first ball, zero. I had to make up some excuse; so I can't remember what I said, but the third match, I scored 7 runs and I was on top of the world. I said, yes! I have achieved something in life and this is how it's going to go.

Karan Thapar: The funny thing is that, in those early days and right up to the age of fourteen, you actually thought you are going to be a pace bowler, is that right?

Sachin Tendulkar: I always somehow liked fast bowling, and I still do. I like watching fast bowlers, and I had gone to Chennai wanting to become a fast bowler, for the selections where Dennis Lillee was going to conduct the MRF pace bowling foundation camp, and nobody knows this, I was also carrying my pads in my bag. So I ended up batting on the nets, on the last day I was batting on the nets instead of becoming a fast bowler. And he said you are too small to become a fast bowler. So, I batted there, enjoyed myself and came back.

Karan Thapar: Okay, 1988 was possibly one of the greatest years in your career. Do you remember, in

February, you were playing in the Harris Shield; that is where you created, along with Vinod Kambli, the world record of 664 runs unbeaten, the highest partnership ever. I gather, right throughout that period, your coach was actually trying to signal you to declare and you just didn't seem to see it.

Sachin Tendulkar: My coach sent a message through somebody and that person was trying to tell me from the boundary line, that you have to declare now, your sir has given me this message, and he has asked you to stop it here. If you have the guts, you will get the runs in the finals, don't thrash them here, save it for the finals, you have got reasonable scores, stop it here. But we just tried to ignore him, and finally at lunch time, he said, okay, now you have had it, you have to call up your sir, he is waiting for your phone call. When I called him up, the first question was, 'What is the score?' I said sir we haven't declared, he said what do you mean, I had sent a message to declare, why didn't you declare? I said, Vinod wanted to bat, so, Vinod said, no no, don't say this, I said, sir Vinod wants to talk to you. Vinod said, 'Sir, I'm batting on 349, can I just make one run and then declare?' He said, 'If you do that you'll have to deal with me in the evening.' We had to finally declare and start the next innings.

Karan Thapar: And in December of that year, that is still in1988, you got your first chance at the age of fifteen, the youngest person ever to play cricket for Bombay, in the Ranji Trophy; do you remember that match?

Sachin Tendulkar: I went in to get a hundred, and got that. I always go out to get a hundred, sometimes I get it, sometimes I don't. But my idea is to go out there and

score runs. And I remember batting on 92, and I think a left arm spinner was bowling, I played one cover drive and an on drive to reach 100, and then we had to declare, I cannot forget that moment.

Karan Thapar: You are a very ambitious and determined person, aren't you?

Sachin Tendulkar: I like to score runs; I don't like losing at all.

Karan Thapar: Do you hate it when you lose? Would you hate yourself when you get out for a duck or you get out before you think you shouldn't?

Sachin Tendulkar: I have to take out my anger on somebody or somewhere, so I prefer to sit alone for a while till I cool down. It all depends on how I've got out. I may be out on zero but if it was a good ball, fair enough, the bowlers are playing for their country to get me out and I am playing for my country to score runs, so it's always going to happen that way.

Karan Thapar: Okay, let me take you to the age of sixteen; it's November 1989, you are just making your debut for India, you are the youngest cricketer ever to play Test cricket for this country, and you walk out to bat. Were you nervous?

Sachin Tendulkar: I was terribly nervous. I didn't know what was happening around me and I said, okay fine, I am just going to go and hit the ball. I went in there, I got beaten, and I said okay, I cannot deal with this. I said this is the first and the last Test match you'll be playing. I don't think you are capable of handling this and I got out and got back to the dressing room, I said oh what have I done, playing for India and such a terrible performance, oh I didn't expect this. I was talking to

myself, and I looked at myself in the mirror and I said, you can't run away from this. You will get another opportunity and you will just go out there and try and hang around, spend as much time as possible there. And fortunately I got another chance in the next Test match, which I was not expecting.

Karan Thapar: Sachin, I am going to take a break here and I am going to come back and talk to you about the cricket you have been playing for ten years for India. We'll be back in a couple of moments, See you then!

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Karan Thapar: Sachin, there are two big losses you have suffered in your cricketing career. The first was in 1987, when everyone thought you should have won the best junior cricketer trophy but you didn't, at the age of fourteen; did that hurt?

Sachin Tendulkar: It did, and I was very upset because I had scored, may be twice as much as the other guy had scored and taken may be 40-50 more wickets, so I was very upset, but one great thing happened to me, which is probably more than this junior cricketer award. I received a letter from Sunil Gavaskar, congratulating me for my performance in that particular year. He said if you go through the fixture, you'll find a name missing who has not got a junior cricketer award and he has not done that badly in Test cricket—and it was him. And I was very thrilled and that is something special to me.

Karan Thapar: The other big loss you suffered came a lot later. You lost the captaincy after having had it for 15-16 months. What do you think went wrong?

Sachin Tendulkar: Well, I think I was very upset about one fact that we came close to winning the game so many

times but we somehow couldn't. The ones which you don't play well and you lose, it is fine and sometimes you don't get it right, it's fine, but when things are happening the way you want them to, that is the time to win the game and we were losing those games; so I was very upset and that is where I thought we went wrong.

Karan Thapar: What could have happened, was it that you didn't try enough or was it bad luck?

Sachin Tendulkar: Well sometimes, it was careless shots, sometimes bad luck. So, it's a combination of everything.

Karan Thapar: There was the time in South Africa, when you were about to win the Test when rain fell just on the stadium itself.

Sachin Tendulkar: I was so disheartened; at lunch time when we got back we were on the verge of winning the Test match and everybody felt we are going to win this Test match. We were just waiting for the lunch time to get over so that we can go and finish the match and it started pouring like anything for a couple of hours and we couldn't do anything. All of us were in tears and then we got an opportunity and they batted for a while and bad light was called after that and we had to stop the game. That was very, very disappointing.

Karan Thapar: Is that something that makes you believe in luck and bad luck?

Sachin Tendulkar: I do believe in luck, not only for the negatives but also for the positives. I would also like to say, when we played last year against Australia, in Sharjah, and in the finals, Fleming was bowling and I left the ball, I was a fraction of a second late while leaving the ball, it just kissed the inner side of the bat and missed

the stump by that much and I got 4 runs for that. Ended up scoring a hundred and we won that tournament.

Karan Thapar: If luck hadn't been with you, you would have got out on this occasion.

Sachin Tendulkar: Would have been out on 4 or 5, may be 6, I don't remember.

Karan Thapar: Does this sort of things make you superstitious in your playing?

Sachin Tendulkar: I am not so superstitious; I just have this habit of wearing my left leg pad first.

Karan Thapar: Always!

Sachin Tendulkar: Always!

Karan Thapar: Why have you never got a double century in Test cricket, you have got close to it but you have never really done it? How do you explain that to yourself?

Sachin Tendulkar: I am trying to find out why I haven't got it yet. I think I just need to be more determined or focused, concentrate harder, and not to give up the fight till the end.

Karan Thapar: You seem to sound as if the fault lies in yourself; is that how you see it, is there something missing?

Sachin Tendulkar: I think it's very hard to find what is missing, because I have tried everything, I have tried to slow down my game, I have tried to accelerate, I have tried to bat normally and somehow I have got out and so, I have go to be patient and try as hard as possible.

Karan Thapar: Does this worry you?

Sachin Tendulkar: Not really, getting 200 is not as important as winning the Test matches for India.

Karan Thapar: Okay, in 1996, you got married to Anjali Mehta; how and where did you meet her?

Sachin Tendulkar: We met through a common friend of ours who was studying medicine with her and occasionally played cricket and he said, we have to go out for dinner. It was at her place and that's how we met.

Karan Thapar: Was it love at first sight?

Sachin Tendulkar: Not really, not really!

Karan Thapar: So were you very careful in choosing her?

Sachin Tendulkar: Well, I have known her for almost ten years now, and as time passes, you realize you have found your partner—but it wasn't love at first sight.

Karan Thapar: Does she share your passion for cricket?

Sachin Tendulkar: Earlier she didn't know anything about cricket. She was into medicine and only books, nothing else; gradually she developed an interest, she started watching my games and now she understands a little bit of cricket.

Karan Thapar: Is she really tense watching you bat? I gather she hates watching you actually while you are batting?

Sachin Tendulkar: Oh yes! She gets very tense, and when things are difficult even my brother gets tense; he has become so superstitious that he doesn't allow anybody to watch the game. No family member is allowed to watch the game live, they can watch the recorded matches.

Karan Thapar: So when Sachin is batting and the whole world is sitting and watching, your family is not watching at all?

Sachin Tendulkar: They are not watching, they are too tense.

Karan Thapar: Are you a family man; are you close to your family?

Sachin Tendulkar: Yes! It's mainly with them, my mother, my brother, my friends playing downstairs, I play a bit of table tennis as well. Every evening we are downstairs playing table tennis.

Karan Thapar: When you say downstairs, is this the same area, the same colony where you grew up?

Sachin Tendulkar: Yes, it is right there.

Karan Thapar: Is it important for you to stay there with the people you spent your childhood with?

Sachin Tendulkar: It's very important to me, because I can become what I am and not what I should be outside the colony, I can be normal again.

Karan Thapar: They are never awed by the big name Sachin Tendulkar?

Sachin Tendulkar: No, not really, it's just what I want from them—I am just one of their friends.

Karan Thapar: So you live with people who treat you normally, who are not overly impressed with your prestige and status?

Sachin Tendulkar: I really like that because that is very rare, and it can only happen with the guys who are very close to me.

Karan Thapar: You are the best Indian celebrity today. Is there a cost to this fame, this fan following?

Sachin Tendulkar: Well, sometimes, when I go out with my family—it's very difficult when I just want to spend some time with my wife and my friends but that doesn't happen.

Karan Thapar: Can you take her to a restaurant, just go shopping?

Sachin Tendulkar: I can take her to a restaurant, but not shopping or a movie. I think it is so important that

you spend some time alone with each other, outside the house. It's so important that we also get a chance to lead our personal lives. It doesn't happen so often. People would just barge in and say can I have your autograph please or maybe just pose for a photograph. I get very upset, not to be able to sit there just by myself, with Anjali next to me, and spend some time together. It's so difficult, but on the other hand, I find it very interesting because I think it's all happening because people like me, they love me, they like my game, they surely want me to perform well and do good for the country. I appreciate all this as well.

Karan Thapar: You are twenty-six, you have another ten years of cricket ahead of you, have you ever asked yourself the question—what then?

Sachin Tendulkar: Not really. At present I am just thinking what I am for my country and what my responsibilities are. I should not think about anything else other than cricket. Maybe a few things here and there, but my focus should always be on cricket.

Karan Thapar: Is there a cricketing goal, a cricketing target that you want to achieve?

Sachin Tendulkar: I always set targets, but I never disclose them.

Karan Thapar: And why is that? So that you can miss them and you don't have to explain?

Sachin Tendulkar: Yes. I think people are surely expecting something of me and that is fair enough. If you are expecting something from me, it's fine, but what my expectations are, I shouldn't disclose. If I can live up to my own expectations, I am doing a decent job for the country and I am waiting for that.

Karan Thapar: Sachin, I am pretty confident that you'll go up to those targets! Thank you very much for talking to us.

Sachin Tendulkar: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 11 August 1999.

Sachin Tendulkar went on to set several more cricketing records over the next seven years. When this book went to press he had amassed over 10,000 runs in Tests including 35 centuries and 4 double centuries and over 14,000 runs in one-day internationals including 39 hundreds.

Sam Manekshaw

Historians compare him to Montgomery, his soldiers call him Sam Manekshaw Bahadur; he is the victor of the Bangladesh war. He is also India's first and only surviving field marshal. But what sort of a man lies behind his formidable reputation and how does he look back on the life that has taken him right to the top? Judge for yourself, meet Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw in the first ever television interview he has given about himself.

Karan Thapar: That's a mouthful of names Field Marshal, how did you end up with so many?

Sam Manekshaw: Oh, very simple. My real name is Sam Manekshaw. When I was a gentleman cadet in Dehra Dun we had a captain called Captain J.L.S. Mclaren: JLSM. So when I was commissioned I thought I also must have initials. So I took my name S, my father's name H, his father's name F, and his father's J. So I became S.H.F.J. Manekshaw.

Karan Thapar: Wonderful, so you made it up to suit yourself?

Sam Manekshaw: That's right.

Karan Thapar: Okay. They compare you to Montgomery—is that a double-edged compliment?

Sam Manekshaw: Utter nonsense. Montgomery was a great soldier; what have I done?

Karan Thapar: You were the victor of the Bangladesh war.

Sam Manekshaw: Yes, and what's that?

Karan Thapar: Montgomery may have been great but he wasn't very modest; are you a modest man?

Sam Manekshaw: I think I am.

Karan Thapar: Okay, you have been quoted as having said that if you were Pakistani, Pakistan would have won the Bangladesh war. Was that a joke? Or were you being partly serious?

Sam Manekshaw: It isn't correct. I don't know who made this story up. It was after the 1971 conflict, I was in my room. A little girl from some magazine came and talked to me about all sorts of things, and then she asked me 'Field Marshal, you belong to the Frontier Force regiment which is in Pakistan. Why didn't you go to Pakistan?' and I said Mr Jinnah did ask me but I have said I have finished commanding and now am an Indian, I have married an Indian girl and I am here. And then she asked me what would have happened if you had gone to Pakistan. So I bent her over and slapped her bottom and said I would have thrashed you.

Karan Thapar: But the interesting part of the story is that Mr Jinnah did actually ask you to consider going to Pakistan?

Sam Manekshaw: Oh, yes. That's quite true.

Karan Thapar: And you said no.

Sam Manekshaw: I merely said. 'What can I do?' He said that your regiment is in Pakistan. I said I have finished commanding now and there is no use my going there.

Karan Thapar: Okay. Let's go back to the very beginning. You were born in April 1914 in Amritsar. What was a Parsi family doing in the Punjab?

Sam Manekshaw: My father was a doctor. He qualified as a doctor in Bombay many years ago, when he was very young, and he got married to my young mother who was eighteen. He couldn't earn a living in Bombay. So they said, 'Dr Manekshaw, go to the Punjab.' Now this is the 1900s. And he said, 'Where is Punjab?' So they got into a train to go to Lahore. Those days there used to be a first class, a second class, and an intermediate class for Anglo-Indians and Parsis; so my parents got into the intermediate class to go to Lahore. At Amritsar station, at 6 o'clock in the morning my father opened the shutter and my poor mother who was seventeen or eighteen saw a Sikh for the first time in her life with his hair down and his beard down and she howled and kicked up a row—she thought she was in a zoo.

Karan Thapar: But despite her initial response your family settled in?

Sam Manekshaw: My father got off the train, 'See, we will get down here; we'll take the next train back.' And he started his practice in Amritsar. And he made a fortune there. He was the only doctor there. He did extremely well.

Karan Thapar: Was it a rich family? Was it a luxurious childhood?

Sam Manekshaw: No, there were six of us, all born and bred in Amritsar.

Karan Thapar: But you went to a public school in Nainital.

Sam Manekshaw: All of us were sent off to boarding schools. I went to Nainital, to Sherwood, Nainital.

Karan Thapar: Tell me, with that sort of background, a doctor parent, public school, how did you end up in the army?

Sam Manekshaw: Look, my father had sent two of my elder brothers to England and they became engineers. My father was a doctor; I used to go with him everywhere, read his material; I wanted to be a doctor myself. I wanted to be a gynecologist.

Karan Thapar: You wanted to give birth to other people's babies?

Sam Manekshaw: No. My father had promised to send me to England. He said if you do well in your Senior Cambridge I will send you. Then I stopped playing games and I stopped everything and I worked and I worked and I did extremely well. When I was fifteen years old I asked my father if I could do any better. And he said you are only fifteen, join college here and when you are eighteen I'll send you as I promised. I didn't speak to my father for eighteen months, and then I read there was an army examination. I asked my mother for 500 rupees, went to Delhi, appeared for the examination and I got through and that's why I am in the army.

Karan Thapar: So you joined the army on the rebound. You could have easily ended up a gynecologist.

Sam Manekshaw: And I could have been a first class gynecologist.

Karan Thapar: Okay. You went to the Indian military academy and you have the distinction of being the first cadet from that academy to have gone on to become the Indian Army Chief. But you didn't graduate from the academy with much distinction, did you?

Sam Manekshaw: No, I passed out as a gentleman cadet.

Karan Thapar: And you should have passed out as a proper second lieutenant?

Sam Manekshaw: No, others became under officers, they became hawaldars or sergeants etc.

Karan Thapar: What happened? Did you get into trouble?

Sam Manekshaw: I was in trouble. But I passed out as gentleman cadet Manekshaw and I became second lieutenant Manekshaw.

Karan Thapar: And in fact trouble dogged you through your army life. I mean in the '30s you were in Burma during World War II and you were badly injured and virtually half your stomach was taken out.

Sam Manekshaw: The Japanese put nine bullets into my stomach. My lungs, liver, kidneys, intestines, everything was perforated. Nobody though I'd live. My father, who is a doctor, wrote to me when I was in hospital—my son, you have been shots in the lungs, if you smoke a cigarette you will be a dead man. You have been shot in the kidney and your liver, if you drink you will be a dead man. I listened to him and I nearly died.

Karan Thapar: You are saying the opposite, that you survived because you didn't listen to him. People have this impression Field Marshal Manekshaw, that yours has been a steady climb upwards, that from the day you joined the army you were destined to get to the top. But in fact in the '60s it almost went terribly wrong. You got into terrible trouble with the then defence minister and a court of enquiry was held against you. What happened?

Sam Manekshaw: Mr Krishna Menon didn't like me. He and I met for the first time at that time he'd had a row with General Thimayya, who got on extremely well with me. He asked me what do you think of General Thimayya. I was a major general and I said I am not

allowed to think about him; he is my commander-in-chief. He said so I can get rid of him tomorrow and I in my usual breezy way said good, I will go up one place. Then I read him a lesson that today you are asking me as a major general what I think of my chief, tomorrow you will be asking my brigadiers and colonels what they think of me. You are sure to ruin discipline, don't do it Mr Minister.

Karan Thapar: And he took that badly?

Sam Manekshaw: He disliked me. He did everything he could to get me out of the army.

Karan Thapar: So he was vengeful and nasty?

Sam Manekshaw: Yes.

Karan Thapar: And did you come close to being dismissed? Were you actually saved by the court of enquiry?

Sam Manekshaw: They had an enquiry against me, there were three generals sitting over there. I was exonerated on every charge. But my promotion was held up for eighteen months. Then the Chinese came to my help. Krishna Menon was sacked. Kaul was sacked and Nehru sent for me. And he said, 'General, will you take over?'

Karan Thapar: Have you always been a lucky man? Has luck always favoured you?

Sam Manekshaw: I suppose so.

Karan Thapar: You became Army Chief in fact in '69; at what point did you realize that you were going to get the top job that everyone covets?

Sam Manekshaw: I was senior. I had done extremely well as an army commander and that was the natural outcome.

Karan Thapar: When the phone rang, the soldiers, the gorkha soldiers celebrated in a unique way—didn't they?

Sam Manekshaw: They did indeed. They were delighted.

Karan Thapar: They dressed up as women and they serenaded you.

Sam Manekshaw: They all do. The gorkhas always dress up and they laugh and joke and we all dance together. That's quite true.

Karan Thapar: But I gather your wife was one of the few people who said to you, 'Sam Manekshaw, there's nothing to celebrate. I always knew you were going to be chief.'

Sam Manekshaw: I remember we were in Calcutta, I was an army commander when the telephone rang and Kumarmangalam who was the chief said, 'Sam Manekshaw, it's just been announced that you are going to be the next chief.' So I walked across from my bedroom to her bedroom and I said, 'Darling, get up. I've just been told that I am going to be chief, aren't you happy?' She said, 'I always knew you were going to be chief!' That's more than I knew anyway.

Karan Thapar: When you took up that job, did you anticipate that you were going to be leading India into perhaps the most decisive battle in the fifty years of its existence?

Sam Manekshaw: Not at that time, I didn't. Remember I took over in 1969. At that time there was no problem. East Pakistan was there, West Pakistan was there, there was no trouble.

Karan Thapar: So you expected sort of a routine job, smooth sailing.

Sam Manekshaw: I thought I will just command my army and that's all.

Karan Thapar: And things turned out very differently, didn't they?

Sam Manekshaw: Yes, they did.

Karan Thapar: I want to take a quick break, Field Marshal. In Part 2 I want to come back and talk about that decisive moment that actually led to making you the icon of the India-Bangladesh war; but first let's take a break. See you in a moment.

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Karan Thapar: Field Marshal, let's talk about the Bangladesh war. It's what you are really remembered for by practically every Indian. It was an amazing campaign; in thirty days you brought the Pakistan army to its knees. What was the most frightening moment for you?

Sam Manekshaw: I had no secrets from Mrs Gandhi, the Prime Minister. I used to see her every morning in her house at 8.30, I'd have coffee with her, we'd walk outside. I'd tell her everything that happened in the last twenty-four hours and what I intended to do in the next twenty-four hours. Around the fifth day of the conflict when I had gone there, everything had gone wrong. The navy had lost a battle, the air force had lost a lot of aircraft on the ground, my advances in Bangladesh were halted and as usual I had gone there—I had coffee and I said, 'Prime Minister, I have bad news for you.' I told her what had happened. She looked at me and smiled, 'You can't win every day, Sam,' and then she turned around and said, 'Anyway Sam, you won't tell anybody when we go

outside. Let everybody think nothing has happened.' About 10 o'clock in the morning I was in my office, everything was going according to plan. I called her up, she was in a cabinet meeting. She said, 'Sam, everything is going beautifully, thank you.' She put the phone down. She dismissed the cabinet and then she rang up, 'Please Sam, come over quickly.' I went over and saw her and she said, 'I was so worried—were you worried?' I said, 'Of course I was worried.'

Karan Thapar: You got on well with her?

Sam Manekshaw: I got on well with her.

Karan Thapar: Would you say one of your strengths was your ability to get on with Mrs Gandhi, to win her confidence but also to get her to accept your judgment?

Sam Manekshaw: Well, she and I got on well. She trusted me, I trusted her; I never kept anything back from her. And she never kept anything back from me.

Karan Thapar: Is it true that she allowed you to choose the date on which India was prepared to actually take up the war?

Sam Manekshaw: Yes, she asked me and I wouldn't tell her. She said please tell me and I said everybody will know. She promised not to tell anybody, so I said it will be on the 4th of January. She said, 'Why 4th?' I said, 'Four is my lucky number, I was born on number 4, my wife's birthday is number 4.'

Karan Thapar: But you chose 4th of Jan, not 4th of December?

Sam Manekshaw: Fourth of December, sorry.

Karan Thapar: Fourth of December.

Sam Manekshaw: I commanded 4 corps. Mr Krishna Menon had an enquiry on me on the 4th. I was exonerated

on the 13th. I was living in 4 King George Avenue, so it was going to be the 4th at 4 o'clock in the morning.

Karan Thapar: And she accepted it?

Sam Manekshaw: And she accepted it.

Karan Thapar: But you have also revealed something else—these sort of coincidences mean a lot to you. Are you superstitious?

Sam Manekshaw: I am not superstitious. When I was in infantry school in Mau, there was a palmist chap who had come to see me and I don't like to meet all these people. He turned around and said, 'You should have been killed on the 22nd of February,' and I said, 'You have got it wrong. I was very badly wounded on the 21st.' He said, 'Sir, you can cut my throat, it must be the 22nd.' I said, 'I will too.' As I was walking across my wife came down. I asked her, 'Do you remember, darling, when I was wounded?' and she said, 'On the 22nd.'

Karan Thapar: But it added up to four and that's why you probably survived.

Sam Manekshaw: That's all.

Karan Thapar: Field Marshal, let me take you back to the Bangladesh war—to what extent did you win because the Pakistan military leadership proved to be incompetent? For instance I gather that they had no fallback strategy to defend Dhaka?

Sam Manekshaw: No, that's not true. The Pakistan army in East Pakistan fought very gallantly. But they had no chance. They were a thousand miles away from their base. I had 8 or 9 miles to make my preparations, I had got superiority almost 15 to 1, they just had no chance, but they fought very gallantly.

Karan Thapar: Is it in fact true that there was a young Pakistani captain, Ehsan Malik, who defended his garrison

so stoutly at Kumaon Pul that you sent him a personal letter?

Sam Manekshaw: That's quite true. We tried to capture a place which he was defending; we tried very hard and we didn't succeed until the third attempt. He fought gallantly and I did send him a personal letter. And when I went to Pakistan after the conflict—I went twice—I mentioned it to their chief, that I think that boy should be given a gallantry award, he fought magnificently.

Karan Thapar: And did they? Or did they have a recommendation against him?

Sam Manekshaw: I don't know. I said he fought gallantly.

Karan Thapar: At the time there were many stories that you were going to take over the country. Were they true?

Sam Manekshaw: No, they weren't. In 1970 Mrs Gandhi's stock politically was very low and I couldn't go to a cocktail party. Everybody was asking, 'General, when are you taking over?' I remember I was with the American ambassador Kenneth who was a great friend of mine, at a cocktail party talking to him when his number two, who was a CIA man, came along and said, 'General, when are you taking over?' And I turned around to Kenneth and said, 'Kenneth, when is the US army taking you over?' He laughed and said, 'Well said, Sam.' But one day I was in my office at 4 o'clock; I had a direct telephone line with Mrs Gandhi. She was in Parliament house. She rang up and said, 'Sam, are you very busy?' And I said, 'Prime Minister; the army staff is always busy but never too busy to see his Prime Minister,' and she said, 'Can you come over?' I said, 'I am having my tea,

Prime Minister,' she said, 'So I'll give you tea,' and I said, 'I get good tea here.' 'I'll give you good tea, you greedy chap.' I walked up in my breezy way and she was sitting down like this and I said, 'Hello Prime Minister. You seem worried?' She looked at me and said, 'I have problems.' 'Cry on my shoulder, what are your problems?' And she looked me straight in the eye and said, 'You are my problem.' And now what have I done, have I made a major speech, have I done something stupid. 'Everybody says you are going to take over from me.' That shook me for about 3 seconds. I walked across, she had a long nose, I have a much longer one. I put my nose next to hers and I said, 'What do you think?' She said, 'You can't.' I said, 'Oh, so you think I am so incompetent?' 'I didn't mean that Sam, you wouldn't,' and I said, 'Much better, Prime Minister, much better. I am going to tell you a little jingle which my daughter sings when she comes back from the convent. "You mind your own business, I mind my own. You kiss your own sweetheart, I kiss mine." I don't mean to interfere politically so long as nobody interferes with me in the army.'

Karan Thapar: And that set her fears at rest.

Sam Manekshaw: That's right.

Karan Thapar: After the war Mrs Gandhi went on in 1973 to elevate you to Field Marshal. But did she also offer the job of Chief of Defence Staff to go with it?

Sam Manekshaw: No. No, she didn't. She made me a field marshal, she said Sam you like the British, will you go there as high commissioner, and I said no Prime Minister, you have forgotten my oath, when I took over as army chief I had taken an oath and I had sworn I will accept nothing from the government but I will command

my army without any interference. She said but you've accepted the post of a field marshal and I said that was my birth right and she said all right if you don't want to go as high commissioner will you become a governor? Go to Bombay the Parsis will love you. And I said thank you very much I don't want to become *lat saab* and my wife will never become a lady. She will remain a woman.

Karan Thapar: But despite that you did not hang up your boots when you stopped being army chief, you took up almost a second career: you became a chairman and you went on to the board of several companies.

Sam Manekshaw: Yes, people asked me to join companies and I joined companies; I have taken on much too much. I am the chairman I think of nine companies and I am on the board of eleven.

Karan Thapar: Do you enjoy being a businessman as much as you enjoyed being a soldier?

Sam Manekshaw: I enjoy every moment of it.

Karan Thapar: You are eighty-six?

Sam Manekshaw: I am eighty-five.

Karan Thapar: You are eighty-five. Forgive me but you look sixty and you have the energy of a forty-year-old; okay Field Marshal, how do you keep yourself going when others of your age have slowed down and given up?

Sam Manekshaw: I sold myself to the devil. I don't know. I just keep going.

Karan Thapar: Is it disciplined, good living or good luck?

Sam Manekshaw: Everything together. I lead a normal life. I take my exercise in the morning with my bullworker, I look after my garden and I work hard.

Karan Thapar: How many minutes a day do you do on your bullworker at this age?

Sam Manekshaw: Ten minutes.

Karan Thapar: Every single day?

Sam Manekshaw: When I am at home.

Karan Thapar: And is it a strict routine you follow, up at a particular time, breakfast at a particular time?

Sam Manekshaw: I get up in the morning, early in the morning at 5.30, my gorkha brings me my chota hazri, my morning cup of tea, I get up, I do my bullworker. I work in the garden and then I wait for my wife to come out of her room so that we can have breakfast.

Karan Thapar: It's been a full life and clearly it's been a good life. Are there still any ambitions that you want to fulfil?

Sam Manekshaw: No.

Karan Thapar: Are you a satisfied person as well as a happy person?

Sam Manekshaw: Very satisfied, very happy, one wife who looks after me and two daughters and grandchildren, we are a very happy family.

Karan Thapar: And in fact you celebrated earlier this year your sixtieth wedding anniversary I believe!

Sam Manekshaw: We did. And our daughters insisted it was a diamond jubilee, 'Father, you have got to give mamma a diamond,' I said, 'Damn it, it costs a lot of money.' But I had to do it.

Karan Thapar: And you gave her one?

Sam Manekshaw: I gave her one.

Karan Thapar: What did she say?

Sam Manekshaw: She thanked me and I said I have got nothing out of the damn thing.

Karan Thapar: Field Marshal, one day we have to meet our maker and when you meet yours and he asks you to account for the time you spent on this earth, what are you going to say to him?

Sam Manekshaw: What am I going to say, Karan? I have had a very pleasant time. I worked very hard, I played very hard. I have enjoyed every moment of my stay.

Karan Thapar: You have lived your life to the fullest. Is that your verdict on yourself?

Sam Manekshaw: Quite so.

Karan Thapar: Field Marshal Manekshaw, thank you very much for the pleasure of this interview.

This interview was telecast on 28 July 1999.
Field Marshal Manekshaw in now ninety-two.

{17}

Shah Rukh Khan

He's a man of many faces and countless voices and not just on the silver screen. His friends and admirers say he can change his appearance very easily and just as quickly as the rest of us change our clothes. So how's he going to present himself today—as we meet India's famous actor of the day, Shah Rukh Khan.

Karan Thapar: Shah Rukh, there's a line in one of you recent movies, a song that you sing where you say 'I'm the best'. Does that apply to you?

Shah Rukh Khan: It applies to actually a lot of complexes I have and the kind of insecurity I have as an actor, as a person. I have a little story which I tell everybody. Uh ... it was about a little boy who was standing next to a huge wall and he had written 'I am great' and then he said, 'You know my brother has achieved a lot more. My sister is a pilot, my father was a big freedom fighter, my mother is a politician and she is a minister. I'd better make this stronger,' and he rubbed it off and he wrote 'I'm the greatest'. So it stems from that kind of complex, that kind of insecurity and just the wanting to be liked. And I have to keep on convincing myself I am the best, otherwise I would succumb to all these insecurities.

Karan Thapar: Your friends say that you are a driven personality, that almost everything you do, everything you have, has to be the best.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes, I believe that if I have to even brush my teeth, I have to do it with so much vigour, as if it's the best brushing that's happening in the world at that point of time.

Karan Thapar: So how long does a toothbrush last?

Shah Rukh Khan: It doesn't last too long. Neither do my teeth actually. I mean, I've to keep going back and getting them checked. But the whole point is, if I have to do something, then you give it your best shot. Because I really have a belief, it sounds too much like philosophy at times but the atmosphere here is such that I would say that you know, we believe in Islam that God is one day going to ask us uh when we go back there he'll say I sent you down on earth to do things. Did you do that? And I want to turn around and say, 'I know you sent us to do lot of things. It would be easier for you to ask me "What are the things you didn't do?"' So I want to put in the best into everything that I do. And maybe I would lose my goal, what I was sent for, but at least I would've done lots of other things. It stems from that.

Karan Thapar: Well you certainly began that way because I gather in your school days you were embarrassingly good at everything. You were captain, hockey captain, football captain, you were top of the class and you won the sword of honour. Everyone must've hated you.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes they hated me so much they made me a film star. I really believe if you're doing something you should give it your best shot. It's not wanting to be the best at that but you should give it your best shot. My best shot would vary from yours, and it would vary for somebody else, but we all have to try our best and leave it. And then hope that it turns out just right.

Karan Thapar: But it always wasn't just a question of trying to be the best. You had a gang of friends in school you called the 'C gang' and you were up to pranks most of the time, weren't you?

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes we were. We were finally even suspended, I think, uh ... from school, and very nearly expelled, but they allowed us to take the exams. But it was always in good fun. We had a gang called 'C gang' and we used to take out from, you know, Maruti 800s—they had just come up and the 800 part had like, you know, zeros which were square, and we would cut it in half and you know make 'C' out of it and stick it here with, uh, you know, all the video cassettes used to have a, b, c, d lettering on it, the alphabets. So we would write 'gang'. And we had shirts—we would only wear blue jeans and white shirts and Niké shoes with grey shoe laces on them and we had this little walk which was, uh, you know, like you as if were walking with a ghetto blaster and we would say things like 'Hang loose', 'Stay loose', 'Cool'. We would just hang out together, I guess. We would go for parties together like that and we would never ask a girl out because we thought of course we were like Dennis the Menace. No girls. I mean you can't ask a girl for a dance and when we did fall in love and did make friends with girls, none of us told each other, for quite some time.

Karan Thapar: In fact, I gather it was first in the company of your friends, the C gang friends, that you proved to everyone you really had terrific acting ability, when you pretended to faint to avoid a maths exam.

Shah Rukh Khan: Oh yes ... huh ... how did you know that? It was actually that we had a teacher called Mr Arora. God bless him, I hope he's doing well. He'd just

joined into the new class and he didn't know us and he was asking us things like 'Do you guys have any problems?' and all and you know we were trying to be smart with him and I just got up and said, 'Yes, I get these attacks.' And he said, 'What kind of attacks?' He was really concerned. He was quite a gentleman. I feel very bad now. But then we were young and stupid and you do these things. I said, 'I get these attacks and I hope I become all right.' And he said, 'Okay. Please sit down.' And now we needed to leave the class and go down to Nirula's or go down to Connaught Place. We were in St Colomba's so what do we do? I just feigned as if I had one of these attacks and I started dribbling from my mouth and you know shaking and he said, 'What happened to you?' and I kept looking at him. My friends took over and said 'Sir, he's got an attack and we need to take him to the hospital right now. It happens to him regularly. We need a shoe, we need a shoe.' And I remember he was wearing brown suede shoes and he says, 'Kisee ka joota do, kisee ka jhoota do' (get someon'es shoe) and we said 'No, no we have to take your shoe. The suede, suede is what works,' and so we took off the poor guy's shoe and we went out and we went to Connaught Place, went around and we came back in the bus and he was like, you know, looking concerned at all the buses parked at the end of the school. And he came and looked at me and I again went like I had just recovered and I somehow lightened up and the poor guy says, 'Can I just have my shoe back?' because the whole day he had been roaming around without the shoe.

Karan Thapar: In those days you used to still live with your parents. Your mother, I believe, was a magistrate,

your father was a former freedom fighter and even owned a restaurant. What sort of childhood was it?

Shah Rukh Khan: Whatever I remember of it was very nice and easy, it was with a lot of freedom. I have an elder sister too. We were never told what to do and what not to do.

Karan Thapar: So the family allowed you to grow up as you wanted.

Shah Rukh Khan: As I wanted really.

Karan Thapar: Was it a liberal family?

Shah Rukh Khan: Very liberal family. Very liberal. As a matter of fact, even in religious teachings, functions, studies, career. Everything was, you know, you just do it the way you want it and be happy about it. And do your best, you know.

Karan Thapar: So religious observance, duties and traditions weren't important. You could be yourself.

Shah Rukh Khan: We, I could be myself. I was told you know, that it's nice to go and read the namaaz, so I would go do it. And the way it was told you know, I just felt like doing it. All my life you know, I wish I can bring up my children like that where you're made to respect it, without being scared of anything that is told to you by your parents. Even to the extent when I was choosing my career my mom said 'I would like you to go in for Sciences.' I said okay. I could take an exam, but I would like to do economics, because I had finished my sciences from school and she said, 'Oh you want to shift over to economics. But can you do the IIT entrance? Can you do this engineering entrance?' I said, 'I can.' She said, 'Okay, just show it to me.' So I did it and I passed it and I said, 'Okay, I passed' and she said, 'Okay you don't need to take it now. Go and do your economics.'

Karan Thapar: You were very close to your mother .How do you remember her?

Shah Rukh Khan: I remember her. Now I remember her as a star. I have a star near my house in Bombay and whenever I feel lonely and I feel sad I go out there and look at one star. I sort of pinpoint it now. And I especially miss her when I'm very happy. I wish she was here.

Karan Thapar: Her death I know was a traumatic experience for you. The saddest part is that she never lived to see your fame and your success.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yeah, she did not. Which is very unfortunate. I remember I'd just finished a ... a ... I was shooting for *Maya Memsaab* in Simla when I was called out to uh, the hospital here that she's not going to ... uh, that she's unwell. We didn't know that she was not going to live because she was absolutely all right before I left and uh ... my new series ... I'd just made an episode of *Circus*, which was a big thing because I had done it in Bombay and uh, with big directors like Saeed Mirza, Aziz Mirza and Kundan Shah ... I really wanted her to see it so we got special permission and put a television screen and a VCR and uh, she could not make out. We put it on for her and she could not make out. And uh, she was very delicate and she would confuse me with the other people sitting there. It was very sad but I told someone I would like to make it so big from the small screen that I would like the screen to get bigger than 70mm so that from up in heaven she could see it.

Karan Thapar: If she were to see the tremendous success you have today, what do you think she'd say to you?

Shah Rukh Khan: *Beta khaana aur khao, bahut patle ho gaye tum.* (Eat properly, you're wilting away)

Karan Thapar: After your mother died, you left Delhi and went and lived in Bombay. Yet I gather you never took any of her possessions and things with you. Why?

Shah Rukh Khan: I didn't think anything. I just felt that if she wanted me to take things that were owned by her, she would stay here and let me use them. She would have liked that, you know, I would be able to stand on my own feet.

Karan Thapar: And that's what you were doing. This is symbolic of that.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes, and I just took one television she gave me. A television from Videocon company. I still remember it and she had bought that for me after I finished my first series *Fauji* and I'd bought it with my money but she went with me and bought it for me. That's the only thing I still have. I took it back.

Karan Thapar: Do you keep it with you? Is it a treasure?

Shah Rukh Khan: Yeah, it's in my house.

Karan Thapar: In the years that followed you married your childhood sweetheart Gauri. Do you remember where and how you first saw her?

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes I remember. I saw her at a party in Safdarjung Enclave. I just saw her from the back. My car was parked and she just got out of her car. She insists it was a blue dress, I remember it as grey. And she had this huge French bun thing on her hair, and I'd never talked to a girl before. I mean I'd spoken to girls but never you know, with the thought of going out with them. What's called going out or having an affair now. And I asked my friend, I was too shy, I still am, and I said would you go up to her and ask her can I dance with her? Because ... I

was very scared that I can't go to a girl because suppose they refuse. My friend went and asked her and she said, 'Look I'm waiting for someone' and I was quite heartbroken. Because I liked her. I liked her physical appearance because that's the first thing I saw, and mmm ... I'm sure she'll beat me up when she sees this programme, but I liked her back side. And I went and said uh, she's waiting for her boyfriend. I got to know later she was waiting for a girl so I said okay there's still a chance. And then I went up to her and she's the first girl I asked for a dance and she's sort of the last one.

Karan Thapar: And she said yes?

Shah Rukh Khan: She said yes and she talked a lot and uh ... after about two years I told her I loved her.

Karan Thapar: But it wasn't easy to get to marry her because her parents weren't keen on marriage at all.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yeah, now I look okay, I wear a suit and my hair is combed back. But then I looked worse than I look in my films even. I had hair all over till here and I was from a different religion. I wanted to be an actor. With this combination if somebody came up to me if I had a daughter and said, Look my head is like this, I'm from a different religion and I want to be a film star, I'd say just pack your bags and get out of the house else I'll kick you out. So I think they were completely right in not wanting me to marry their daughter and they have a uh ... a close-knit joint family where everyone thinks of the younger ones as their own kid. I mean they've been brought up like that.

Karan Thapar: Today of course you get along brilliantly with your in-laws but in fact when you did eventually get married to Gauri, you had to first have a secret marriage.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yeah it was hard because there was going to be a hassle because if we were to marry in the courts we had to put it across for a month and when you do that there were some institutions like, who took offence to that I was marrying a girl outside the religion.

Karan Thapar: You had protests outside the house.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes we had protests outside the house, like. We sort of uh ... fortunately I didn't have a house in my name, so I'd given my friend's address. So instead of throwing stones at me they were throwing stones at my friend. Sanjay was calling us and saying, 'They're throwing stones at my house yaar.' That happened and we had to keep it a little under wraps.

Karan Thapar: Gauri never wanted a husband who was an actor. But now that you've become perhaps the most famous actor in India, is she reconciled to it?

Shah Rukh Khan: No, it's not that she didn't want someone to be an actor. I was always acting. I was acting in theatre with Barry John, I was doing it in school, I was doing television when I met her. I mean we'd already met but I was doing television and stuff. But I think anybody would be a little wary because of what you read and what you understand and what the film industry is like. Uh, a different city, going down there, her parents were very scared. So I think all this put together can make you a little insecure. But I told her just before we married, we'll stand by each other and if not out of love at least out of righteousness. This promise I will make to you. Let's just go down and start a new life. And, uh, it didn't turn out so bad. And now she says it's okay but she still doesn't like me as an actor.

Karan Thapar: She'd rather you weren't one.

Shah Rukh Khan: She doesn't like me, how I act.

Karan Thapar: She doesn't like your acting?

Shah Rukh Khan: No.

Karan Thapar: She's a lady of immaculate taste.

Shah Rukh Khan: I think now ... I now realize that perhaps when she said she doesn't want me to be an actor, that's what she meant, because she still doesn't think I can act.

Karan Thapar: You now have a young son. Has he made a big difference?

Shah Rukh Khan: I do find uh ... you know, I've loved kids always. I've done theatre also for kids and I think I'm quite a kid myself. I'm thirty-three years old but I just feel like a kid, everyone tells me that. I really enjoy with him because he's this one person who doesn't know who I am, where I come from, what I stand for, whether I'm good, bad or ugly, whether I'm related to him, also perhaps ...

Karan Thapar: And that makes you feel good.

Shah Rukh Khan: Oh, that makes me feel so wanted and he's one person I don't have a complex with. I don't want to be wanted by him because he just wants me so much on his own.

Karan Thapar: So Aryan the little boy is the answer to your insecurities?

Shah Rukh Khan: He's the answer to my prayers. He's the answer to wanting to be close to my mother.

Karan Thapar: Shah Rukh, I want to take a break now, I want to come back and talk about the acting styles that have made you the actor that you are today. We'll be back in a couple of minutes.

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Karan Thapar: My guest is Shah Rukh Khan. Shah Rukh, I gather that the first commercial thing that you ever did on stage was *Annie Get Your Gun* in Delhi. Now, I saw that production but I don't remember seeing you. What role were you playing?

Shah Rukh Khan: Strangely, as strange as it sounds, I was the principal dancer. I was taken for my dancing abilities, though I just can't dance really. And I had one line in it, when I come to Annie with the letter and say, 'I have a message for you.' And she takes that and it is I think a message from her boyfriend or something where he was not being nice to her and she just throws the letter in my face and says, 'Get out!'

Karan Thapar: Now, of course your big moment on the television screen came in *Fauji*, but I believe it happened almost by accident, you were supposed to play a small part and you ended up as one of the heroes!

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes, I had a small role as Karan Kapoor's son while he was supposed to play the main role. He was also the cinematographer of the serial and at the last minute he decided that he couldn't do both the jobs so they called upon me and asked me, 'Would you do it?' And I said, 'I'd love to do it!' So they cut my hair and I was doing double shifts because by that time I was doing another serial with make-up, so I was doing double shifts and this was right in the middle of it.

Karan Thapar: And the big break came up in Aziz Mirza's *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman*, and thereafter there has been absolutely no looking back, but if you are to look back in a sense, how would you explain to yourself your incredible success and popularity?

Shah Rukh Khan: I don't know, I am more shocked myself than anybody else actually because my friends

and my co-actors and actresses, they know that I'm quite easy-going and fun to work with. And you know, I've had a lot of actresses telling me that when we first saw you we went eeks! Now they still find it very strange, they're still working with me nine or ten years later and they still say, 'Shah Rukh, how did you become a hero?'

Karan Thapar: They think it's a miracle!

Shah Rukh Khan: It's more than a miracle, I think it's God's blessings, it's my mother's blessings, it's the love of the audience and it's so many things besides what I really thought was the case.

Karan Thapar: Let my try and get an explanation, how much of it was due to the fact that you deliberately challenged the sort of conventional roles other actors have played, here's a dint with nonconformism.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes, I because I was getting a little bored coming from theatre, I really didn't want to do the regular thing, just be nice and sweet ...

Karan Thapar: Just run around trees! You couldn't ...

Shah Rukh Khan: Well you couldn't say that, I love running around trees, and I think it's great to be doing that and at thirty-forty it's even better! I just wanted to be bad because I think it's one of the elements which everyone has but they don't show it. And I just played bad to enjoy, I had nothing to lose, I just went ahead and that sort of hit the right chord, maybe the timing was right. I believe that I am perhaps not the right kind of person but I had been there at the right time I think.

Karan Thapar: What about something else, how much of your success is due to your uniquely energetic style and manner?

Shah Rukh Khan: I've been criticized for it a lot of times but I believe that till I have the energy I should use

that form of acting because I have a belief there is nothing like under-acting and over-acting. I think especially in Hindi cinema where every character has to break into a song, you cannot have really round characters, you cannot have steady characters, so what you need to do is just enjoy yourself and let the others enjoy themselves. I like to, like I have said, hold up a mirror while I am acting and tell the other guy, 'Look, I'm playing you,' that's all. I don't like to play anything else, I don't like to go deeply into acting, I don't believe in that kind of stuff. And the energy is because I like to fill the space because I don't want to be part of the space, I don't want to be part of the atmosphere. I want to *be* the atmosphere. And that's how ...

Karan Thapar: It sounds as if you don't so much act as actually perform.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes, yes I tell everyone I am an entertainer, I 'm a *nautanki*, I'm a *bhand*—I am just supposed to go ahead and make people laugh.

Karan Thapar: So you're deliberately larger than life. You deliberately go over the top. That's what you want to do.

Shah Rukh Khan: Oh yes, yes. I would like to tell anyone who knows even a little about acting that the critics, everybody who writes about mannerisms and under-playing and over-playing and over the top, they're speaking complete and utter nonsense because there is nothing like the 'right' way to do a scene and a 'wrong' way to do a scene. There's just a way to do a scene, your way, my way, any way could be right, and I believe that and I go overboard and I believe a loose fit is better than a tight fit, so go over the top, if somebody wants to hang and chop it a little they can go ahead and do it. But I like just performing.

Karan Thapar: I think it is fair to say that this film persona of Shah Rukh is so different to the real person. They say that actually he's a lonely man.

Shah Rukh Khan: Yes, I ... I strangely ... I was lonely before, so to say that I am after becoming a star ... I just feel very lonely and I don't like being left alone, I like to be with crowds, I can't socialize with them, but I get very scared when I am alone ...

Karan Thapar: Are you scared of yourself sometimes?

Shah Rukh Khan: I'm scared of being alone with myself yes, I get scared of myself, and I don't like myself I think too much. And I have, I think that's when you become an actor, not because people normally say you love yourself that's why you've become a star, yes when you become a star anyway, I think you become an actor that you don't like.

Karan Thapar: So acting is in a sense a way of escaping from yourself. You're becoming someone else because you don't want to be Shah Rukh.

Shah Rukh Khan: It's ironic that a lot of people tell me that they would like to be Shah Rukh and Shah Rukh will say he'll like to be Ramesh or Rahul or Raj or Batman or Superman.

Karan Thapar: Anyone but Shah Rukh?

Shah Rukh Khan: Anyone but Shah Rukh.

Karan Thapar: In fact in one of your magazine interviews you said that, 'I am not a happy person.' Is this what you meant?

Shah Rukh Khan: I am unhappy because I'm always ... like the energy part that you talked about, I'm restless, I don't have a goal, I don't have an ending inside, I don't think any achievement is a sense of achievement for me.

I need to finish it and go for the next and that can make you a little unhappy and dissatisfied. I'm always dissatisfied and may be that's what can be called hunger and greed to keep on doing more work. You know I'd say I have done the work of twenty years in the last ten years and they seem to pass by in ten minutes.

Karan Thapar: It's amazing because people looking at you would say he's got such enormous success, done such a lot of work and yet you seem to suggest it doesn't mean very much to you.

Shah Rukh Khan: I never worked towards this, I just wanted to feel happy, when I feel happy, when I see a film, when I see a good moment, there are some moments when I feel very happy looking at myself on screen, and a lot of people don't appreciate it.

Karan Thapar: Do you think you've achieved enough, I mean are you satisfied today with ...

Shah Rukh Khan: I will never be satisfied. Like I said, I am like a mountain climber who is not going for the peak, I just want to climb that's all, I don't want to end there and stand and put the flag and say, 'I've reached.' I don't want to ...

Karan Thapar: You'll live perpetually with the fear that if you stop then you may start falling; you have to keep going...

Shah Rukh Khan: I just have to keep climbing and it's not for ambition, it's not for greed, it's not just for success, it's just for the want of climbing, I just want to climb.

Karan Thapar: But one of the things that you've just recently climbed is you've set up a company called Dreamz Unlimited with Juhi Chawla and you just produced your first movie *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*. Are you happy with it?

Shah Rukh Khan: I'm very happy with it as a producer. Aziz Mirza, myself and Juhi and the other guys who gave me my first break with *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman*, agreed to work with me and they are wonderful friends and I'm very close to them. And we started it and we produced the film and we did it in eleven months, we released it on time and we have backed it up with a lot of publicity and ...

Karan Thapar: The critics as you know have been less than generous sometimes. People even say in the papers that the audiences have not come to see this film in the same way that they have seen other ones. Does that disappoint you?

Shah Rukh Khan: No I think the film was based on the media, and I think the media has not taken too much of a liking to the idea that we have made fun of them.

Karan Thapar: So you think that people of my profession have been deliberately unkind because they can't take ...

Shah Rukh Khan: I have been unkind to them in the film also, so it will be unfair to say that.

Karan Thapar: Is this going to be a second fiddle, a second venture: that you are going to take up producing films? Or is this the one odd ...

Shah Rukh Khan: I wanted to produce films because I love films, not only as an actor, and it's not a narcissistic thing that I want to be a star, I just want to make films because they have given so much to me, everything that I have stood for for the last ten years is because of films and I think it's high time someone of my status decided to give something back to films.

Karan Thapar: Shah Rukh, you said earlier in this interview that you're thirty-four and you could carry on

being an actor for the next forty-fifty years. Is that how you see your future? Or are you looking endlessly for new challenges? Are there, are there peaks that you want to climb other than just the cinema world?

Shah Rukh Khan: I mean I would just like to, you know I feel really nice acting, I feel really wonderful being able to make people laugh and I feel even more wonderful when I am driving down in a main road and there's a person I don't know and he looks at me and says 'Shah Rukh!' and a smile comes. And I think I've been blessed by God and my mother that I am able to do that, for one fraction of a second wherever I go in the world. And I would like to just keep making sure that people smile for that one fraction of a second when they see me. Besides that if life requires me to climb a mountain, whether it makes me want to go on to the moon, if it makes me have to make films, if it has me produce films whatever it takes, I just want people to smile so that I feel secure.

Karan Thapar: Shah Rukh, I'm sure that you will continue to do that for many years to come. Thank you very much for this interview.

Shah Rukh Khan: Thank you.

This interview was telecast on 26 February 2000.

For several years now, Shah Rukh Khan has been Bollywood's number one star actor.

Sonal Mansingh

Her name is often spoken of in reverence, but it has also been the source of social gossip. She is one of India's foremost dancers, but getting to the top hasn't been easy. She has faced a lot of adversity but she has never let it get her down. How does she do it? Judge for yourself as we meet Sonal Mansingh.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Sonal.

Sonal Mansingh: Hello Karan and thank you.

Karan Thapar: Sonal, they say that what Sonal wants, she always gets. She never takes no for an answer. Is that an exaggeration or is that in fact the secret of your success?

Sonal Mansingh: My name is Sonal, which means golden. To become gold you have to go through fire. So I have gone through a lot of tests and obstacles, but then I get what I want because what I want is always wonderful.

Karan Thapar: And is that because of your name?

Sonal Mansingh: Right.

Karan Thapar: Now, in fact you come from a very illustrious family and I gather that your grandfather was a very important person. Tell me about him.

Sonal Mansingh: My grandfather was a lawyer who studied under gas lamps in Bombay. And then he practised law under Muhammad Ali Jinnah before he decided to

join the freedom movement and donated all his property to Mahatma Gandhi, became one of his closest associates, and a great friend of Sardar Patel.

Karan Thapar: And went on to become, I believe, Mr Mangaldas Pakvasa, one of the first Governors of independent India.

Sonal Mansingh: 1947, at the stroke of midnight, and I remember we were all carried on an elephant. I was a small girl in Nagpur, which was the capital of Central Provinces and Berar. Berar was joined to Central Provinces, making it the largest chunk of territory in India and there we were. And although by then he had resigned from Congress because he didn't agree with some of Nehru's policies, and he had resigned even from that four anna membership, still he was a personal friend and a personal recommendee of Mahatma Gandhi ...

Karan Thapar: And all the big names we associate with the independence movement, Nehru, Gandhi, Patel were in fact family friends?

Sonal Mansingh: Patel certainly was; from childhood we saw Sardar Patel in and out. In fact Maniben Patel, his daughter, who was always very very serene and austere, would laugh and joke with us and Sardar Patel. My first recollection of our Delhi visit was in 1948, at the first Governors' Conference. We stayed in Sardar Patel's house on No.1 Aurangzeb Road. And we were getting in the way when they were leaving for Rashtrapati Bhawan. So Sardar said, '*Arre bacchon ke liye kuchh khelne ka intezaam karo?*' He spoke in Gujarati, you know, 'give them some toys'. And in the evening when they came back, he said, 'Maniben, what did you do with children all day?' 'I've got them live toys.' She'd collected

all the malis and drivers and everybody for us to play with.

Karan Thapar: So in a sense you've been used to commanding people since you were a little baby?

Sonal Mansingh: Oh well, I wish that were true, Karan.

Karan Thapar: Now, your grandfather was the patriarch of the family, but little Sonal was very special to him, wasn't she?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, I think being the second child, with an elder sister and a younger brother, I was sandwiched. And he had a special eye for me. And he was very indulgent. He was indulgent to all, especially to women. But I was, I think, quite special. And I treated him more like a friend than like a grandfather.

Karan Thapar: When you first took to dancing, it wasn't something that he was particularly keen you should do and in fact, in your teens, you often clashed with him over dancing lessons, didn't you?

Sonal Mansingh: The real irony was that as Governor, he entertained all the big names of Indian art—musicians, instrumentalists, dancers, all you know, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Omkarnath Thakur. You name them and they were all state guests, staying in the Government House. Every day concerts were held, and he was very fond of that. We were taught by private teachers and at school—I never went to convent school by the way–we were all put in Gujarati medium schools. When it came to doing dance in a real big way, going for my classes morning and evening, then he put a stop to it. He said, 'What's all this going on? I don't want a dancer (*naachne wali*) in my house.' Such clashes, I think, made my resolve that much firmer.

Karan Thapar: There was a day when he caught you going to the second dance lesson of the day, and he stopped you and said, 'Go to your room.' But everything went very differently, didn't it?

Sonal Mansingh: Absolutely. I did go to my teacher and broke down and cried, and refused to go back to Government House. He sent ADCs, his secretary, everyone. At night at about ten-thirty or eleven, they drove me back in their little Morris 8, and there I was sitting and my mother was there, and he was very upset, but I was more upset. And so I just vanished into my room, my teachers did the talking. And for three days I didn't eat. I didn't drink. I refused to see anyone.

Karan Thapar: You were sulking with your grandfather.

Sonal Mansingh: I was. I was. But then you see, Karan, what I learnt from him was that we are always open to reasoning, to logic, to arguments, to a dialogue. On the third day, he finally just came and physically hauled me on to his lap and said, 'I want to talk to you, talk to me. I know you're very angry. I want to hear what you have to say.' And so I said, 'How do you account for this kind of a thing? Rukmani Devi is your personal friend. And you stop me from going, you say "No dancing". Why did you teach me dance? And why did you scold me in front of everyone?' You know that was another thing at that age, that what you had to say should be said in private, not in front of others.

Karan Thapar: Did you win him round? Did you convince him that there was essential truth in your position?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes. And Karan, I'll never forget, that was the time the guidelines for my career were

drawn. He said, 'One thing, promise me one thing, and I'll do everything for you.' And that one thing was that I would never use dance as business.

Karan Thapar: And have you stuck by that golden rule?

Sonal Mansingh: I have.

Karan Thapar: So dance then, in a sense has been creativity, it has not been money-making for Sonal.

Sonal Mansingh: No. Otherwise I would've built myself houses and what not and institutes instead of living in a rented apartment fighting in the courts, and not being able to build my institution even after ten years.

Karan Thapar: But you know, one of the things that dance did do was bring into your life a succession of very colourful men. And I believe one of the earliest admirers was the Polish director, Andres Schwabian; is that correct?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, yes. I was **Sonal** Pakvasa I had been not married. I'd come to dance for the earlier film festival. The 'really chosen people' used to come. There was a dinner at Rashtrapati Bhawan. But he just sort of sought me out and I danced with him. He'd come specially from Bombay. I still remember his blue, blue eyes and he was a very interesting man. At that point, I was willing to run away with him.

Karan Thapar: But you never did. You restrained yourself. But you did meet your first husband a couple of years later in '64 at a performance, Lalit Mansingh. Was it love at first sight?

Sonal Mansingh: No, no, no. He had his first sight on me because I was on stage. I was dancing, and he was in the audience.

Karan Thapar: So he saw you, but you never noticed him at all?

Sonal Mansingh: I didn't know who on earth he was.

Karan Thapar: But when you did fall in love, you had the most unusual engagement, didn't you?

Sonal Mansingh: Well, yes. And I wish I'd got married to that sword also. I was engaged to a sword, because he was in Geneva and his parents were in Cuttack in Orissa. So my father escorted me to Orissa. First he sat down with a map and said, 'So, where is Cuttack? How do we go from Bombay?'

Karan Thapar: Is that because Orissa was beyond what he considered the ken of civilization as he knew it?

Sonal Mansingh: 1965, back of beyond! And finally when we got there they said, 'We are Khandayak Kshatriyas. And Lalit is not there. *Nirbandha* hoga.' And with the sword. So with the sword I was tied, and I was engaged to a sword.

Karan Thapar: So Lalit wasn't there. The sword replaced him. And Sonal was betrothed to a sword.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes. But I thought the same sword then chopped us apart later.

Karan Thapar: That happened a couple of years later. But before that your father-in-law, Lalit Mansingh's father, introduced you to the world of Odissi dancing.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, a most wonderful man. My grandfather, and Lalit's father, Dr Mayadhar Mansingh are the two people who influenced me the most, who gave me certain values which I hold dear to myself, and whom I invoke every day.

Karan Thapar: So you have a great debt to your father-in-law, your first father-in-law, even if you don't necessarily ...

Sonal Mansingh: Only one father-in-law.

Karan Thapar: But there was a second husband who comes later in the story.

Sonal Mansingh: Nevertheless; I mean, he didn't have a father.

Karan Thapar: So, this first father-in-law was special?

Sonal Mansingh: Very special.

Karan Thapar: And he took you to the great Kelucharan Mahapatra, didn't he?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes. He said to my father, 'Leave her behind, we want to know her better and she should know us better.' My father left happily for Bombay, leaving me there. And the same evening my father-in-law said, 'You are a big name in *Bharatnatyam*,' I was a big name already. Then he said, 'Now, as Odissi, Oriya *bahu*, I want you to learn Odissi. How about that?' I said, 'Fine.' So, we often went to Kala Vikash Kendra. I hadn't the least idea of what he was going to do. And he arrived at Kala Vikash Kendra, with his cane and smiling eyes, they were all there to receive him. And Kelu Babu came running. He pointed his cane at Kelu and said, 'Kelu'. And Kelu fell at his feet and said, 'Sir, what can I do for you?' 'This is my daughter-in-law and you will teach her Odissi.' And that was that. Then he sat down with his cane and watched my first lesson.

Karan Thapar: And from that moment, the great Odissi dancer was born. Now you said a moment ago, and I want to take you up on that, that the sword that engaged you also ended up chopping up the marriage, and you didn't stay married to Lalit Mansingh for more than about six-seven years. What went wrong? Was he the wrong man, or was the dance too possessive a mistress to give you time for the husband?

Sonal Mansingh: Karan, may I ask what went right? What went right is that ... yes you're right, the dance had always been the central point in my life. Maybe at that young age I had not realized that. I knew I loved dance, there was a flame in me. But, you know, I wanted to experience life and at that point, like all mothers, my mother had said, 'Get married, have children, be a good wife, everything else follows.'

Karan Thapar: So you weren't ready for marriage, really. It was too early for you.

Sonal Mansingh: I don't know if I ever was, or have been. But, the point is that I did have a wonderful life with Lalit. I do not wish to say what went wrong or what went right, because, you know, between two people so many things happen. But Lalit was of course married to his career, and I was wedded to my dance. And the question always asked is that, 'Then why did you marry?' But the point is that, you know, they say that when you marry, you experience everything. If it doesn't go right, good, *Jai Ramji ki*. All the best.

Karan Thapar: It's a part of life. And in fact the flow of life took you in 1974 to Germany where you had a terrible car accident. You broke a collar bone, several ribs, twelve vertebrae. What happened?

Sonal Mansingh: Twelve vertebrae. Well, I was teaching a workshop in Bayreuth, which was the Richard Wagner's Mecca. And at the time of the international festival, I was also teaching a workshop. We'd gone to visit our friends. It was a Sunday, and we were returning late at night; it's a very wooded area, and that time it was adjoining the East German border. So there were very few cars and it was drizzling and dark. A deer ran

across. And although we know, good drivers know that you never, ever brake at high speed for an animal, for anything, well, we did. The car did three turtle summersaults, I was thrown out about fifteen feet.

Karan Thapar: The doctors said you'd never dance again, but you proved them wrong within two years.

Sonal Mansingh: One year.

Karan Thapar: One year.

Sonal Mansingh: In one year.

Karan Thapar: Was that a heroic feat?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, that was, but again I would say that I'm convinced I was born to dance. That reconfirmed my idea. And without Dr Pierre Gravel, my **physician in** Montreal, it wouldn't have been possible. In Germany, they said, 'You can't ever dance again. You may walk after two years.' I was taken to Montreal where my German friend was posted, and that's where this chap heard about me, because he'd seen me dance before I'd gone to Germany. And he heard about this. He came from his holiday. He looked at me and he took charge, and he helped me come back.

Karan Thapar: So your doctor, in a sense, gave you the strength to recover and become a dancer again.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes. He said, 'I'll talk to the German chap and find out if you can really not dance.' And you know, I couldn't speak, my ribs were broken, I was in terrible pain. I was like a worm. And then he came back. One day he comes and says, 'I have to tell you, what really is the case.' And Karan, believe you me, I was looking at him, lying flat, he was there, with his blue eyes. He said, 'I'm afraid you …' and I started howling; '…you will be able to dance again!' He reinstilled in me the desire

to live again, and he said, 'I took a psychological bet; I had to bring this girl up.'

Karan Thapar: Okay, you did recover. You danced better than ever before. And you also got married a second time. You married George Lechner. And once again, two years later, it was all over.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes.

Karan Thapar: You're not very successful with marriages, are you?

Sonal Mansingh: Karan, I've realized that I'm very successful with friendships, but marriage puts a burden on you. It stretches you towards duty, responsibility, all the words that were absent earlier, enter your life.

Karan Thapar: So Sonal's a free girl who likes her freedom and to whom marriage means constraints.

Sonal Mansingh: Not for the men; to them it means my duty as a wife. I mean, earlier in my friendships I've always been very, very honest, very close, very warm. I've been a giver. The minute the man gets married to me, he expects X, Y, Z, A, B, C, A to Z.

Karan Thapar: You're saying the men were wrong. But do you think there's a slight danger that perhaps Sonal was a little selfish?

Sonal Mansingh: I'm not saying that the men are all wrong. Men are all right. And I'm also right. And there is something in between, that between two rights maybe something doesn't work. I'm hugely selfish and hugely self-centered. Why not? Aren't you, aren't we all, while doing something worthwhile in life?

Karan Thapar: Let's take a break at that point. Sonal, I want to come back in Part II and talk about what it is like being this wonderful person sitting in front of me,

Sonal Mansingh. We'll be back in just a couple of moments. Stay with us.

~*~

Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is Sonal Mansingh. Sonal, your unconventional lifestyle has made you, sadly at times, the butt of social gossip. How have you contended with it? Do you ignore it completely? Literally, water off a duck's back? But there have been times, haven't there, when it's cost you? I mean, for instance you were struck off the national honours for a long, long time because people thought you weren't right for it.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, that I was leading am immoral life. But just as well, Karan, because then it made **a point to me to be feeling rather guilty about it all.** And finally when the honour came, it came in a big way.

Karan Thapar: Tell me how it came, because there's a lovely, charming story attached with it.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, absolutely. It's very moving. I still feel moved by it. Shri R. Venkataraman was our President then and he had seen me dance, and he liked me very much. So one day I got a call from Gopal Gandhi, who was then his Joint Secretary and he said, 'The President wants to see you.' So off and on, once every month or two months I used to go and see him and say hello. One day he said, 'Okay, come and have tea and bring your bio-data.' I said, 'My bio-data? Come on.' So he says, 'Just do as I say, please, and don't be late.' Because I was often late, you know, five or ten minutes here and there. So this time I was there on time. And I was ushered in and all the nice things came to eat and we

had coffee–filter coffee–and we talked about this and that. Suddenly he said, 'Now, you have got something for me?' So, I said, 'Sir, but ...' 'Didn't Gopal tell you?' I said, 'Yes sir, but, I mean ...' 'Give it to me.' So he took it and he scanned through it quickly. And then he said, 'Is it true that you have not been honoured?' I said, yes, I have this and that award. 'Have you been honored with a National Award, the Padma Award?' I said, 'No sir, but you know, it might have been ...' He said, 'Now, if you allow me, I would like to rectify that mistake.' He literally used the words 'rectify this mistake'. At that point I broke down and I think I wept and I bowed to him and I said, 'It will be my great good fortune and privilege.' I don't exactly remember what I said. But this was something so fantastic, that the President of India should summon me and offer this to me.

Karan Thapar: So it was enough to sort of wipe off the memory of all the earlier insults and innuendos you'd had to suffer.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, yes.

Karan Thapar: Of course there was another person from the establishment who also was a close friend of yours, Morarji Desai. And when he was Prime Minister, I gather you almost inspired the choice of the new President.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, yes. I'm very proud of that. We'd gone to meet him because he complained to my father that, 'I've become Prime Minister, the whole world has come to meet me, Sonal hasn't come to meet me.' My father scolded me. So I said, 'Oh, I'll go'. And he was a family friend. So, I saw Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy coming out of his room. He was then the speaker of the

Parliament. 'What is he doing here?' And I've been always like this, straight-talker, you know. So he says, 'Well, he wants to become the President.' I said, 'Can't you ever think beyond politicians and politics?' He said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Well, what about artists? They're such great people.' 'Give me a name.' I said, 'I'll give you a woman's name, Rukmini Devi.' 'Good name! Where is she?' and all that. But finally Rukmini Devi turned down the proposal, which was such a sad thing. So till date, you haven't had an artist or a woman as a President of India.

Karan Thapar: Amazing. You almost chose the name for the biggest job in the country.

Sonal Mansingh: Yes.

Karan Thapar: You're fifty-six today, and alone. Are you also lonely? Do you miss having children?

Sonal Mansingh: I'm alone by choice. I like my solitude. I've created my space, and my pace and my time, after great struggle, Karan. Do you know what it means to live your own life the way you want? So many people say it. They don't do it. They can't do it.

Karan Thapar: So many people also say that there comes an age, fifty, fifty-five, when one wants a child. Do you ever feel you wanted a child?

Sonal Mansingh: I have so many.

Karan Thapar: Your students?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes. They all bring their little things and put them in my lap; my students are more than my children.

Karan Thapar: Are they surrogate children? Are you making them your family because there isn't another family?

Sonal Mansingh: I don't make anybody my family. I don't want a family. I just want my friends. I want my

students. I want everyone to be happy. I want to be left alone, after some point. I think it is inborn in my nature. I like my solitude. I like to be with myself, to read, to do whatever I like. And I want no interference, thank you very much!

Karan Thapar: At times are you a difficult person? Are you a demanding person?

Sonal Mansingh: Yes, at times. Look, if I'm living in solitude, how can I be demanding?

Karan Thapar: But what about this drawing of lines, 'This is my sphere, I want to keep it to myself ,' this possessiveness of independence? Does it make you a difficult person for others to be with?

Sonal Mansingh: No. I think I flow quite a lot. Because you know here is the art of living at work. I don't have to talk about it. But I'm living it. I live in a flow of life. I don't deny people. They have access to me. I'm very accessible. I don't have a secretary. I pick up my own telephones. I give interview. People come to me to ask me for guidance about problems. You won't believe it, I can open a consultancy tomorrow. At the same time, for a certain period of time every day, I keep away. I keep it for myself. If I don't do that, I'd go mad.

Karan Thapar: And now what? You're only fifty-six. You've got all the awards. You're a great dancer. What are the mountain peaks left in the future you want to climb?

Sonal Mansingh: Ha ha ha! My, God, I'm looking forward to another at least twenty years of a richer, richer life, all the things I haven't done.

Karan Thapar: The fire burns as strongly inside you as it ever did.

Sonal Mansingh: I want to dance. I want to create new things. I want to go scuba diving. I want to become the President of India. I want to do so many things.

Karan Thapar: You want to be the President of India?

Sonal Mansingh: Why not?

Karan Thapar: You want to be what Rukmini Devi should have been?

Sonal Mansingh: And as I proposed the name I imagine it is my chance now, don't you think? I'd make a good President.

Karan Thapar: Are you doing anything about it or are you just simply telling me?

Sonal Mansingh: What can one do about it? One can just ... sometimes I really wonder, why not?

Karan Thapar: And would you ever consider getting married a third time? Would you ever say to yourself, 'Maybe those were just two mistakes. There is still the right man waiting for me'?

Sonal Mansingh: Karan, I don't deny anything in life, ever since my accident. I was a fantastic, bubbly thing one minute, the next minute I was like a worm with a broken back. So how do I know what's awaiting me in life? I just take it as it comes every day and I'm so happy, believe you me.

Karan Thapar: That's the other secret of Sonal, isn't it? Take life as it comes and take it in its flow.

Sonal Mansingh: And laugh a lot.

Karan Thapar: Sonal, you've given us a lot to laugh about during this interview. Good luck, and thank you for a lovely conversation.

Sonal Mansingh: Thank you Karan. Thank you so much.

This interview was telecast on 3 May 2000.
Sonal Mansingh was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2003. Till 2005, when she stepped down from the position, she was the Chairperson of the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Viswanathan Anand

When I first met him six years ago, he predicted that one day he would win the World Chess Championship. When on Christmas Eve 2000 he did, it was in fact a dream come true. My guest today is someone who is the stuff of legends. But what is he himself like? What is the person underneath all about? Well, let's see if he reveals a bit of his personality as I introduce you to the new world chess champion, Viswanathan Anand.

Karan Thapar: Welcome to the programme, Anand.
Viswanathan: Nice to meet you.
Anand
Karan Thapar: Let's go back to that moment on 24 December when Alexei Shirov put out his hand to concede defeat. What was the first thought that went through your mind?
Viswanathan Anand:: It was all pretty hazy. It was just a blur. It went by very fast. I was pacing around waiting for him to resign and I had been expecting him to resign for about ten moves already. And he had managed to find resources that kept the game going. And then, finally, it was getting to a point where it was all over. And, at some point I was pacing about. So, he had to wait for me to come back on stage before he could resign. He resigned. I shook hands. I had this feeling it must be

over now. But I didn't want to do something really foolish till I knew, it really was over.

Karan Thapar: You wanted confirmation.

Viswanathan Anand: Something like that, and then, it just went very fast. The audience started clapping and then in some sense I understood that it had happened. But it didn't hit me for a while. Maybe till the next day it hadn't really sunk in.

Karan Thapar: It wasn't just that you won. It was in fact the overwhelming nature of your victory. Did that surprise you?

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, it did. I mean, I certainly expected it to be a very tough match. Alexei is one of the toughest players in the world and he's been one of the best players for a while now. So three and a half hours was like a dream. I couldn't have expected it to go so well.

Karan Thapar: Many people said afterwards that somewhere during the second game, the game where you beat him for the first time, he began to mentally crumble. Do you think, looking at him, as you sat opposite him, you got that feeling yourself?

Viswanathan Anand: He himself indicated this as the reason. I have the feeling that he let this game slip away and it's a game he should have been able to draw. As for me, I grew in confidence after this game. I thought that this is just a free point and this is beautiful. Obviously I had to work very hard. The final game went on to God knows how many moves. But I had this feeling that it should've been a draw and I got an extra half point and that's a bonus and now when we play, we were exactly as we were before except I'm a point ahead and this is brilliant.

Karan Thapar: Did you suddenly have an inkling, God's on my side?

Viswanathan Anand: Exactly. I can do everything as I was going to do anyway, but with an extra point. I mean it's just an extra point in the bank. That's great!

Karan Thapar: Critics turned around and said that because players like Kasparov and Kramnik weren't actually participating in the FIDE Championship, somehow, this wasn't a full-fledged championship. How did you react to that sort of, slightly churlish comment?

Viswanathan Anand: I'll basically say that it wasn't in my control. And what I can't control, I don't worry about. I couldn't put a gun to their heads and force them to play. If they chose not to play, there's nothing I can do about it. And there is no championship in the world where those guys are going to play in, where they are going to get everybody to play as well. So, that's just tough.

Karan Thapar: Now, I'm told from all the newspaper articles that shortly after you won in Tehran, you rang your mother. Is it true that she ticked you off for what she thought was a badly played point earlier on?

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, in fact there were two ways to win. One was to take a bishop, which had been hanging, swap queens and then ... a process which I basically felt was certain to win but it was going to take a long time. I had to slowly mop one of his pawns after the other and win. And the other one, which was to attack the queen and then there would be this blaze of, or flurry of tactics and if everything worked out well, it should be over in about five moves. But somehow at that stage I felt I'm so close to the Championship, I'm going to go the slow road. You know, I'm just going to take the bishop, swap the

queens and then slowly mop up. I don't want to take any chances.

Karan Thapar: No risk at all.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes.Whereas, of course my mother sitting at home decided, but this could be over in five minutes. You did it in over twenty moves or something.

Karan Thapar: There was an earlier scary moment, wasn't there? I wonder did you have that in your mind at this moment? Because when you were playing Khalifman there was a scary moment you went through. You came through it fine, but people say that briefly you'd looked death in the eye.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes and I think till that point I had been slightly nervous. Maybe nervous is not even the best word, maybe apprehensive. Because you understand that you can do your job well and so on but somehow in this format you can't even afford one mistake. One mistake, badly timed, just finishes the match. And in two game matches where the first game is a draw, the second game has this effect of the sword hanging over you. But once I've been through that and survived that then I really had this incredible feeling of something being on my side.

Karan Thapar: So near-death was in the sense a very reassuring feeling. Because you begin to feel that if I've escaped it someone's on my side.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, you stop worrying about irrational things after that. I mean until that point you keep thinking this and that. And after this you suddenly become very objective and very calm. If I don't see it, it's probably not there. And then you become even more confident.

Karan Thapar: But as you said it requires one bad moment for things to go wrong. Let's talk briefly about the earlier two attempts.

Viswanathan Anand: Hmmm.

Karan Thapar: In '95, you played against Kasparov and you lost that by a margin of three points. Was that inexperience or was that because you were in fact nervous?

Viswanathan Anand: I think mainly it was inexperience. By the time the match had finished I had concluded that in that match he was still far superior. I had understood that there were a lot of areas I needed to work on. And especially in the second half it became evident. We were playing an even match and again we're not talking of just chess capacity over here. We're talking of preparation and just a feeling for when the critical moment in a match comes and how to deal with it then and so on.

Karan Thapar: You sound as if you learnt a lot from your experience.

Viswanathan Anand: Oh, absolutely. I think that match was very useful for me.

Karan Thapar: But also is it a useful thing to say just that yes he probably is at this point in time the better player, but I now know what I know, what I need to do to get to that level.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, very much. I could see that his openings withstood beatings much better than mine did. Mine, you know, one hit and it was sunk whereas his could take five hits. So, suddenly I could see how he'd worked out his repertoire and so on. And then, I understood, you just have to clearly work but that's the objective. You really need to learn that before you can get to the next stage.

Karan Thapar: Now the second bit during the World Championship happened three years later in '98 against Karpov.

Viswanathan Anand: Hmmm.

Karan Thapar: And that ended in a dramatic tie. Sort of, three all. What happened there? Was that a momentary lapse of concentration?

Viswanathan Anand: To be honest, when I went for that game, I felt fine and I felt confident. I didn't have the slightest indication that something might go wrong. And then at the board, I was playing well up to a point and then again I cannot say I felt a certain nervousness or I had any feeling; in fact it was like my hand had completely divorced itself from my body. It started making moves that I couldn't understand and suddenly it was all over.

Karan Thapar: Did you think the Hand of God suddenly slipped?

Viswanathan Anand: Well, I don't know. Maybe I should have made a move with my foot, to complete the Maradona analogy. But I think basically I was really quite tired by that point and the win the previous day had really cost me a lot more energy than I had realized. Somehow with the euphoria—Oh my God! It's 3-3, if it was 2-3 and I won that game to tie the match! But the euphoria can sometimes mask the other problems you have. But I cannot say it affected me in any great way because I understood that the match is fundamentally unfair. Karpov should never have been seeded in the final.

Karan Thapar: Absolutely, since he got a leap straight in.

Viswanathan Anand: Exactly, so you know it didn't affect me or my confidence in any way. I understood.

Okay, it would have been nice to finish it there but basically I never felt like I had lost anything.

Karan Thapar: But defeat is never easy to take in. Twice you had, before you actually won it, the World Chess Championship in your grasp but you weren't able to clinch it. That must have been pretty shattering.

Viswanathan Anand: No, not really. Like I said, with the win it didn't really sink in for a while. You know, till maybe the 25th or the 26th, by which time I was the World Champion.

Karan Thapar: But the opposite—isn't that also true? When defeat sinks in, doesn't it depress you?

Viswanathan Anand: Exactly, but in both cases, I dealt with it quite well. With the Kasparov match, it was a one-point lead, a two-point lead, and you had time to adjust to this.

Karan Thapar: You were expecting it in the back of your mind.

Viswanathan Anand: By the time it actually happened, the 17th game was a big try. I tried my best and got to a winning position and let it slip away. That could have reduced the deficit to two points. I kept it comparative. But anyway, the 18th game finished. But by that time I had time to mentally prepare myself. So, already I was thinking what I was going to do next. And with the Karpov match, I went back home and I thought, there was no point even feeling angry with myself or depressed. Because this is silly, the guy cheated, I mean he should never have had these conditions. And then I just left it at that and when it started to sink in—by this point I honestly just felt fine.

Karan Thapar: So you mentally just switch yourself off and put defeat aside and get on with life.

Viswanathan Anand: Exactly the same thing that delays your appreciation of your victory, also proved a very useful quality when I lost these matches because I was able to view it very objectively and very dispassionately.

Karan Thapar: Tell me something, how much of a chess game is actually played in terms of mental toughness and perhaps even psychology?

Viswanathan Anand: Well, to be honest, most of it, of course. Pure chess knowledge—the technical side is very, very important when there are huge differences in strength, but usually either both players have a fundamental and strategic understanding of the game that's of the same level, or one compensates by tactical skill what the other compensates with positional feeling or something. When you get this balance then the game is almost purely mental and that's the main thing. You know most of the time you are making these leaps into the unknown. At some time, you will leave your opening preparation, you will leave the familiar ground and you will go into areas where you are basically daring the other guy. Okay, here's my move, refute it if you can. He has to come up with something. And both sides understand that they are somehow getting deeper and deeper. And at some point the game will fundamentally pass the point of no return.

Karan Thapar: So, he who dares better wins.

Viswanathan Anand: To some degree, but at that point your decisions are really just about your intuitions and your mental strength. You obviously have to make the right decision. It just has to be right enough. It just has to be a little better than your opponent's. That's all that matters there.

Karan Thapar: One of your opponents once said, 'He keeps incredibly calm when I know he is in a losing position and that unnerves me because I say what's he got up his sleeve?' So it's a sort of game you are playing?

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, I can be quite distant about it and may be even philosophical. At some point if I understand I'm in a losing position then I can switch myself off and say, 'I am losing but what can be worse; nothing more is going to happen to me.'

Karan Thapar: Can you do the opposite—fool your opponent to think that even though he thinks you're losing, you're actually winning?

Viswanathan Anand: Well, that effect he has to do for himself I'm afraid. I can't do it for him. But what I do is look really confident and this is not a ploy about him. At some point I relax; when I understand that my position is completely lost and I can't do anything about it, then I relax. I just think, okay, the worst thing that can happen to me is that I'll lose the game; I'll get a zero on the scoreboard. Fine, but I'll have fun. I'll make him work a little bit, you know, enjoy torturing him maybe, putting problems and things like that. And sometimes, if you approach a problem that way it can affect your opponent. I can't say I have a plan always. Of course, I do lose games. I can't say that it always works. Sometimes you can at least wind up your opponent a little bit.

Karan Thapar: Let's take a break. Now, I want to come back in Part Two and talk about the person that lies behind this incredibly complex psychology and brain that keeps winning every chess championship he competes in. We'll be back in just a couple of moments. Stick with us.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is Viswanathan Anand. Let's talk a little about you personally in this part Anand. You are the youngest of three children and your siblings are considerably older than you. What sort of memories of childhood do you have?

Viswanathan Anand: Basically very pleasant ones. I always felt I've lived a very happy childhood. I can't really recall any major problems I had.

Karan Thapar: You are the baby of the family.

Viswanathan Anand: Pretty much.

Karan Thapar: Who did the indulging, Mummy, Daddy, both?

Viswanathan Anand: Both of them and my sisters and brothers as well, and I could play all of them off with each other. I mean if my brother gave me a hassle, I could go to Dad and so on. So it worked out; but in the end they all pampered me silly.

Karan Thapar: So game playing began very early when you were playing games with the family.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, very much.

Karan Thapar: They say that you have a photographic memory. Is that true?

Viswanathan Anand: I have a very good memory of some things ... so-so memory for other things. I can start memorizing facts quickly.

Karan Thapar: You also forget what you want to forget.

Viswanathan Anand: If you put it that way, yes. I forget whatever doesn't interest me and whatever I don't want to remember I can forget pretty efficiently as well.

Karan Thapar: Your parents say that when you were three, they began to test your memory by using the family collection of records. Do you remember that?

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, very much. I think, I've even seen some photos of those where I used to be put on the stool, climb on top of it to reach the records and then scan them and of course there were these three or four records that I really liked very much and my parents were impressed with what speed I could pick it up just by the colour or the cover or something and from just the tip, I would yank it out, put it in, play the song and that was it.

Karan Thapar: They also say that although you were quiet, perhaps even reserved as a child, when you were inside your paddle car your entire personality changed.

Viswanathan Anand: I remember we had this long corridor and so in this paddle car, I used to do the fastest speed possible, and brake exactly a few inches before the wall and reverse. But I don't know if there was a personality change. No Jekyll and Hyde stuff here. Just me having fun.

Karan Thapar: You started playing chess when you were seven or eight, when your mother actually began to teach you. Do you remember those early games?

Viswanathan Anand: Very little. I remember that when I was about six, I learnt the game and then I remember something about going to the tournaments but I don't remember the games. I remember the books I read and things like that and how I'd try out certain things that the book said. Sometimes I'd get mated immediately and sometimes they would work and so on. But it was quite gradual. I remember my first tournament but I can't really remember the games I played at home.

Karan Thapar: So did the fascination, and perhaps even the talent, just blossom when your parents moved to the Philippines, in the late seventies, early eighties?

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, very much. In the Philippines there was a very active tournament circuit. And at that point, chess was really big in the Philippines. So you'd have these TV programmes on and basically if you keep having these inputs, it allows you to sustain your interest and it grows. I think by the time I came back, I was a chess-lover.

Karan Thapar: There was a particular TV programme called *Chess Today*, which used to have a regular competition. Surely you couldn't have forgotten that.

Viswanathan Anand: No I haven't. In fact I still remember, almost all the books I have nowadays are still the books I've picked up in that competition. Basically you'd have this puzzle every day. You solve it and send in your solutions and if you were the winner—probably there would be several people who solved it—they would pick a winner who could go and collect his book. And after I won quite a few prizes they took me to this—and I remember that moment vividly—huge room full of chess books and said, 'Just pick whatever you want, take all the books you want and please don't enter again. You've won five or six already. It's getting ridiculous.' So, that was quite nice.

Karan Thapar: It was between that period when you came back to India in 1983 that you really started taking part in competitions and winning them and you've won I think, everything from the National Sub-Junior Chess Championship to the World Chess Championship. But which has given you the biggest thrill?

Viswanathan Anand: I guess for each moment, that competition has a special value. I can remember what it was like winning the National Sub-Junior for the first time.

Karan Thapar: You were thirteen when you won the National Sub-Junior Championship.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, I was thirteen then and I won the National Junior as well, which was the under-twenty, and so I qualified for the National Championship, finished fourth. It was a magical period of five months or six months when I went from becoming a random club player to number four in the country, National Sub-Junior Champion, National Junior Champion. It was just fantastic.

Karan Thapar: You don't have really clear memories till about four-five years ago. I mean you were winning about two or three championships in a year. So is that also a sort of blur?

Viswanathan Anand: This period was pretty sensational and it went by pretty fast. And I may say, in the end I took it with *sang froid*.

Karan Thapar: But *sang froid* at that age must have been pretty difficult. You were all of fourteen, fifteen and in school. Did the schoolboys tease you or prod you, adulate you or ignore you and dislike you?

Viswanathan Anand: No, no, they were very sweet, all of them. In fact they were very nice. None of them got the ideas that I somehow had to be treated specially or something like that. But they would all follow the papers every day and all of them were always interested in what I did. But I was already famous in the school. In the Philippines, they have this school bag which was very popular. Almost all the kids there had it. But it was kind of a huge box and they would put all their books in it and bring it. And in my school here, I think I was the only kid who had a box like that. So many years later, I remember, when I was in ninth standard or tenth standard, kids coming up to me and saying, 'Oh yeah! You were the kid

with that box.' So I was famous already before I was known to be a chess player in the school.

Karan Thapar: Then in 1996, you got married to your wife Aruna. It was an arranged marriage. Where did the two of you meet?

Viswanathan Anand: Well, it went pretty much the way you'd expect. Her parents were there and there was a broker. And then her parents and my parents got together and then the horoscopes and all that.

Karan Thapar: So it was matchmaker-matchmaker find me a match?

Viswanathan Anand: Yeah, very much.

Karan Thapar: But can I ask why an arranged marriage? Did you not trust yourself to fall in love with the right person?

Viswanathan Anand: Basically, for I was quite lazy. So it kind of worked out.

Karan Thapar: Too lazy to fall in love?

Viswanathan Anand: Too lazy to really stir out of bed and go anywhere and get into all that effort. I cannot say I actively pushed it or something. On this point it's always the parents saying it's time for you to get married. I don't know many kids who'll go to their parents and say it's time now, so, can you fix someone for me? It just doesn't work that way; it's always the parents anticipating this sort of thing.

Karan Thapar: Now, chess of course is a solitary game. But are chess players solitary people?

Viswanathan Anand: Chess players can be pretty absorbed in what they do. And, if that's nutty then we're nutty. But I've seen the whole range. I've seen some chess players who are clearly nutty but there are lots of others who are fine as well.

Karan Thapar: Where do you come in that category?

Viswanathan Anand: I would hope in the normal category.

Karan Thapar: The world has seen the strong, silent, dominant Anand behind the chess board. What's he like when he's not playing chess?

Viswanathan Anand: I like the fact that I'm pretty laid back and I always like to crack jokes at other people and just have a good time. I'm not that serious at all.

Karan Thapar: Your friends have said that in fact you have a wicked sense of humour and that you are always playing pranks on people.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes. I like doing that and I know quite a few chess playing friends also who tend to do that a lot. So, we sit and have a good time.

Karan Thapar: And I gather you also are a great mimic. You do an excellent Russian accent.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, because there are so many Russians in chess, eventually I picked up this accent. I don't know if I'm a great mimic for other things, but the Russian accent I can do pretty well. Especially, I love the way they switch their consonants; they can't say 'h'. So they always substitute 'g' for it. So, you know, you have 'alcogol' and 'garmony' and all these things and I love teasing them about it, but that's just good-natured stuff.

Karan Thapar: So your secret weapon against Garry Kasparov and perhaps even Anatoly Karpov, when they are perhaps playing a little better than they should, is to imitate them back and frighten them?

Viswanathan Anand: I can imitate them a little bit, but they are not that stereotypical. Actually I think they've understood this and done a little bit of work on their 'h's

along with their English. Anatoly, I can tease. The guy really takes these jokes very well.

Karan Thapar: He's got a good sense of humour.

Viswanathan Anand: He's got a very good sense of humour. I can really pull his leg and sometimes Aruna tells me afterwards, 'I think you are really pushing it.'

Karan Thapar: What about Kasparov? He's a bit defensive.

Viswanathan Anand: Kasparov, well, you can do one and then you have to watch his reaction. He can just explode. He's very sensitive about them.

Karan Thapar: Volatile?

Viswanathan Anand: He's very volatile and basically he can't take it. He can't separate his mood from the game to the post-game period or the evening or something like that. He stays in the same mode most of the time.

Karan Thapar: Whereas you can quite easily switch off after the game is over and get into a different mood in the evening?

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, very much.

Karan Thapar: In fact, they say of you that your greatest talent is not just that you are a brilliant chess player but that you are a gentleman at the same time. Is that something you consciously strive at?

Viswanathan Anand: I find it much easier to be like that. I know for a fact that I cannot be that focused after the game. In fact I think that I'm not even that focused during the game. I tend to do something much better if I'm having fun and if I think I'm having fun. I don't think I will do something better, be it chess or be it whatever, if I'm serious about it and think, 'Okay, now it's time to do a good job' or something. I can't actually work like that.

Karan Thapar: So, you are not containing yourself. You are just naturally polite.

Viswanathan Anand: Exactly, and I think in general I find it much easier just to be easy going. That's just the way I am and I found that this has no effect on my chess. I play equally well when I'm sitting there, all worked up, trying to do a good job or just having fun.

Karan Thapar: And that just doesn't change your manner or the way you speak or anything?

Viswanathan Anand: No, not at all. I just find it easier that way. So far it hasn't hurt me.

Karan Thapar: And now that you are right at the top of the chess world and you are only thirty-one. What now?

Viswanathan Anand: I would like to play at least another ten years of top chess. And you'll always find new goals. You can break new rating barriers. You can win tournaments again and again. You can retain your world title. I mean there is just no end to new challenges, new peaks to be conquered.

Karan Thapar: So, as they say, the king is born, but this king is determined to reign for a long time.

Viswanathan Anand: Yes, absolutely.

Karan Thapar: Well, good luck and I'll look forward to the reign. Thank you very much for a wonderful interview.

Viswanathan Anand: Thank you very much.

This interview was telecast on 21 February 2001.

Viswanathan Anand won the FIDE World Chess Championship in 2000, and the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship in 2003. He has been awarded the Chess Oscar (given every year to the best chess player in the world) a record four times.

{20}

Ustad Zakir Hussain

They say he is the greatest tabla player in the world. And he's been called the sexiest man in India. But does that really sum him up? Find that out for yourself as we meet Zakir Hussain.

Karan Thapar: Zakir, welcome to the programme.

Zakir Hussain: Thank you Karan, it's great to be here.

Karan Thapar: I have to begin by saying, do you recognize yourself with those descriptions or would you like to describe yourself as someone completely different?

Zakir Hussain: I would say that just like any other person, I'm also a student of the various activities that I'm involved in and I am learning a lot. So I don't know if I'm the greatest in tabla, but at the same time I'd say that it's certainly a big part of me.

Karan Thapar: You very carefully sidestepped the issue of being the sexiest man in India.

Zakir Hussain: Never heard of such a thing. What's that you're talking about? *(Both laugh)*

Karan Thapar: Let's go to the beginning of the phenomenon that is called Zakir Hussain today. I gather that virtually from the day you were born, your father Ustad Alla Rakha determined that you would be a great musician?

Zakir Hussain: It was a conspiracy. I was not at all a part of it. I was brought from the hospital two days after

I came to this earth, this world, and he picked me up in his arms and started singing rhythms in my ear, as opposed to what the religious person said, sing some nice spiritual words in his ear, say some words. So he said, okay, and he started saying ta ta ki ta di ta ta ki di ... and all that stuff. So then for him those were the religious words, the spiritual mantras.

Karan Thapar: And it worked, didn't it? I mean at a very young age, at the age of seven, which is an astonishing age, you were giving your first public performance.

Zakir Hussain: Yes, but that was to get his attention. He did this reverse psychological thing to me. He went on doing this thing in my ear until I was two, and then he promptly gave me away and did not look at me, and started teaching his students. So then I'd be, 'Look at me, I can play, come on dad,' but none of this bothered him at all. Until I was seven and I was totally hooked and I had to convince him that I could do it. So then I played at this little concert and then he said to me, 'Okay, do you really want to study this, do you know all that is involved?' And then I said, 'Yes, by all means, I'll go with it as you say,' and then he started teaching me in earnest.

Karan Thapar: Except that he had a very strange and unusual way of doing that. He wouldn't teach you during the day, he'd always do it late at night.

Zakir Hussain: I think the tradition in Indian music has always been that the masters always practiced at night, they were night birds. They played concerts at night, came home and practiced until the wee hours of the morning and they slept through the day. That was the routine and he felt the quietest time of the day was

the night time and nobody bothered you, no phones rang, and so that was the best time to teach me, and my teaching was not always banging on the drums. There was talking, telling history, myths and legends of the old masters. Also talking about music, interacting on a more personal one-on-one basis in an intimate fashion as opposed to just playing on the drums.

Karan Thapar: But how old were you then? You must have been six?

Zakir Hussain: I was seven when this happened.

Karan Thapar: And it was at two every night ...

Zakir Hussain: About two or three every morning till about five or six, and then I'd go to school.

Karan Thapar: So weren't you sleepy?

Zakir Hussain: I slept in the school.

Karan Thapar: That was your revenge, was it?

Zakir Hussain: Yes, I mean, you want me to do this, you lose out on something. No actually, I found the school benches very receptive to the hands.

Karan Thapar: Made for sleeping?

Zakir Hussain: Made for sleeping and practicing.

Karan Thapar: So a little bit of both.

Zakir Hussain: So a little bit of both. The best thing is, I'd get thrown out of class because I'd practice on the benches.

Karan Thapar: in those days you used to handle your father's correspondence and I gather, when people wrote to him inviting him to come and perform you would write back to say he couldn't do it but you offered someone else to do it? Specifically you?

Zakir Hussain: Oh yes. I offered someone else, a very talented young musician, a student of his and also his

son. I was the only English speaking kid in the house and so I'd reply to his letters and so ... this was when I was twelve or so and I could play concerts with the masters. So I'd substitute me for him, if he was not around and sometimes I'd get away with it and sometimes I wouldn't. I mean, they wanted the master and if he wasn't available they'd go find another master.

Karan Thapar: There was an occasion when they actually accepted your offer and you had to go to Ara. But it didn't quite end the way you expected?

Zakir Hussain: No, it didn't end quite that way. And Ara is like a village you know, as compared to Mumbai. You have to be in a train for two days, well two nights and one full day and it was tough for a twelve-year-old to do that. And I did it, and I went over there with my tabla. I arrived to play a concert with some musicians and the organizer failed to receive me at the station and it was simply because he didn't think I was the one, he expected someone in a dhoti, kurta, paan in his mouth, kind of older you know ...

Karan Thapar: This little boy perhaps in his shorts wasn't what he was looking for.

Zakir Hussain: He wasn't looking for me. And then finally he saw this bag which looked like a tabla bag and he asked me, 'Are you with Zakir Hussain?' I said, 'I *am* Zakir Hussain.' And he said, 'I was expecting someone older.' So anyway, he brought me in and I played the concert and I got off after playing the concert and like all other musicians, I started looking for the organizer, who had promptly left with all the cash.

Karan Thapar: And you weren't paid!

Zakir Hussain: And I wasn't paid.

Karan Thapar: So you were twelve years old in Bihar, and had no money.

Zakir Hussain: I was left with about twelve rupees in all in my pocket and no way to get back home to Mumbai. And there was one musician who actually helped me, in the sense that he brought me to Banares with him. He was a musician from Banares. In Banares I knew of a student of my father's. So I contacted him on the phone; I had those numbers. I was lucky or smart enough to bring them with me. It was nearby and then he arranged for me to finally get home.

Karan Thapar: And when you got back home, what did your parents say?

Zakir Hussain: My father wasn't around but my mother made sure that I knew that I had done mischief in more ways than you could imagine.

Karan Thapar: In fact, well into those early days, am I right in believing that though your mother was proud of you, she didn't really want you to be a musician?

Zakir Hussain: No way, I mean in those days mothers always wanted their sons to be doctors or engineers, like nowadays it is cricketers, musicians, in those days it was doctors and engineers.

Karan Thapar: It was also because musicians weren't one of the highly paid professionals at that time, wasn't it?

Zakir Hussain: And also that music was not that widely accepted as a way of life in those days and even in the realm of music, tabla players were secondary, second class citizens, they came later. So it was important for her to think that I would take up a profession that I could fall back on.

Karan Thapar: She wanted something better.

Zakir Hussain: Something better like a nine-to-five, a steady income coming home every month and that was important for her, because she had spent most of her young life waiting for my father to bring home the bacon. So she didn't want to have to worry about that with me. She'd rather have me lead a better life. And in that way, I can say that she became partly successful because she actually helped to educate me.

Karan Thapar: She was the one who insisted that you go to school.

Zakir Hussain: She insisted that I go to school, an English school, study English and all that stuff.

Karan Thapar: So, if your father was the person who actually ensured that you became a musician, your mother was the person who ensured that you get educated so that you are able to stand up for yourself.

Zakir Hussain: Stand up for myself and be able to interact better with the world. So they both together accomplished what was needed for me to become who I am today.

Karan Thapar: Take me back to those early days. What sort of a family was it that you were born into?

Zakir Hussain: Well, it's a Muslim family, my mother is a very conservative Muslim and my father, although he is a Muslim, is more of a musician, a Sufi in a way. Since music in India is a concoction or confluence of Hindu and Muslim cultures, it's a way of life in itself. So we grew up worshiping Saraswati because she is the goddess of music and we believed we are all *pujaris* of Saraswati. And the music has been handed down from Shiva's dumroo to Ganesha's pakhawaj to Krishna's flute and so all that comes together. So here we are in a Muslim family

where all those elements are involved in there, and my mother frantically trying to make sure that my sisters go to an Islamic school and learn Urdu and Arabic and my father seeing to it that I go to concerts and listen to music and all his students are Maharashtrians and Gujaratis and what not and I am basically mixing in and coming back home and going to a Catholic school.

Karan Thapar: It sounds like very liberal, eclectic and so different from the traditional background that Muslim children have.

Zakir Hussain: Exactly, exactly, and that was the way I was brought up. My father was instrumental in providing the liberal attitude along with the tradition of music. So there were rules. And my mother brought in the tradition of a family, of certain cultural rules like being a conservative Muslim. So there were both traditions kind of coming together.

Karan Thapar: Gelling together.

Zakir Hussain: I guess I was lucky enough not to get confused because the third one was the Catholic school where I had to go to church on Wednesdays, and attend Saturday masses, so it was rather confusing for me as a child, wondering where my allegiance lay, for a while but then I figured it out that my allegiance was towards music and that was the way I wanted it to be.

Karan Thapar: And as you say, the allegiance was to music: that was always on top. But tell me, today you're not just a major star, often when you are playing, you're a bigger star than the person you're accompanying. And yet within the context of the performance you are strictly an accompanist. Is that a contradiction or is that where the trick of being a tabla player lies?

Zakir Hussain: It is a challenge to be famous, to be well known, as a tabla player and to be expected to be a maestro when you are on stage and to show your stuff when you are playing, totally keeping in mind that you are playing with somebody where you are not supposed to take over. So it is a difficult thing to be patient, to curb your desire to display your wares; in the context of playing with a musician like Ravi Shankar or Ali Akbar Khan or Shiv Kumar Sharma or anybody, I'm strictly an accompanist, I'm subordinate, I am following them. But at the same time, I'm an important part in the performance, in the sense that from a little bud, to a complete bouquet, we have to harvest the field together. We have to make this happen together. When the musician is performing and I'm playing with him, within the first minute or two, I have to judge and analyse what this musician is feeling at that time. What he's going through and what he's trying to express though his music, his temperament, his feelings, his emotions. And so in that sense, I'm almost a psychiatrist.

Karan Thapar: You actually make it sound so easy, but I imagine it's actually quite difficult.

Zakir Hussain: It is quite difficult, because to get to that point I have to know each and every aspect of the music. So I must know what folk music is, what classical vocal music is, what classical instrumental music is, what dance is.

Karan Thapar: So what happens when something goes completely wrong? Has that ever happened?

Zakir Hussain: It has happened, things do fall apart every now and then. But you do tend to run into situations where you meet a musician and you've never played with

him before and the guy comes up with something so unusual and unique and you wonder what do I do? And so you hang on to dear life and hope that after a few minutes he'd realize that he'd better come down to something more accessible. And this has happened to me with people like Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan because they are such incredible musicians and they come up with some fancy stuff and you are just totally at sea.

Karan Thapar: I would like to come up with some fancy stuff for my cameras by taking you in Part Two into a world that opened up for you when you went to USA in 1970. Let's take a break and come back and see what America and the West have meant for Zakir.

Zakir Hussain: By all means.

Karan Thapar: See you in a moment. Don't go away.

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Karan Thapar: Welcome back. My guest is Zakir Hussain. Zakir, in the last thirty years you have spent a lot of your time in America. Looking at your career, how important was your decision at the age of nineteen to go to America?

Zakir Hussain: It was the single most important decision that I have ever made. But in a way the decision was already made for me, at least in its initial phase. What I mean to say by that is that my father fell sick. And somebody had to replace him. There was a concert with Ravi Shankar and they felt comfortable enough and confident enough in my ability to replace him.

Karan Thapar: So God in a way made the decision by making your father sick?

Zakir Hussain: So I landed up at New York to play with Ravi Shankar. And the first thing that he said on

the stage when we sat down was, 'Ladies and gentlemen, you must be wondering why Allah Rakha has suddenly gone so thin and young. But this is not Allah Rakha. In a sense it is his spirit. This is his son.' And then I played the concert. Then we did a few more. But one interesting thing that happened and Ravi Shankarji was instrumental in it was that he said, 'What will you do now?' I said, 'I guess I have to go back.' He said, 'Well, you are here. And there is an opening at the University of Washington at Seattle for an assistant professor in the music department.' It was a music college.

Karan Thapar: And you were only nineteen?

Zakir Hussain: I was nineteen. 'And they want you.' I was hesitant and he said, 'It's a great opportunity. You are a young man, you are here. Why don't you?' So in a way he helped me to make my decision. So I went. There I was in the university, and God the whole world opened up to me. I did not realize that there was so much there that we don't have in India available at your fingertips.

Karan Thapar: And you dabbled in a lot of it. One of the few things that you did was to experiment with fusion music in the beginning.

Zakir Hussain: Oh yes. That was the next thing. But when I arrived, when you leave India, you have this attitude. The attitude is that I am the keeper of this 5000-year-old tradition. No one else has it in the world. We are unique. We are the teachers. So come to us and learn. We don't realize that there are equally old traditions existing all over the world

Karan Thapar: So America taught you humility.

Zakir Hussain: Yes, suddenly I had to become very humble very quickly. You know, I used to stand in front

of the mirror and say, 'I am humble, I am humble, I am humble.' Five hundred times. And then I graduated to 'I am very humble. I am very humble.' The fact is that I realized there is Arabic music, there is African music, there is Indonesian, there is Chinese classical, Japanese classical, Korean music, all kinds of music.

Karan Thapar: Fusion was part of this awakening.

Zakir Hussain: This was the awakening that was taking place on the west coast in America, where people were beginning to realize that there are other traditions in the world which are incredible. So I just jumped headlong into it, into studying African music and Middle Eastern music to try and do my PhD in music.

Karan Thapar: Was it just world music that you began? There was something else that you began later on. You began contributing to films, you did music for *The Godfather*. Was that a natural step or was that an offer that you couldn't refuse?

Zakir Hussain: It was a natural step. You see my father was a composer for some films here; so we grew up listening to that, so the bug was there. I have played in a lot of Indian songs. So when I was abroad, there was this kind of a thought that existed that I wanted to explore every kind of avenue in terms of music; so playing fusion music, playing with Shakti or Van Morrison and stuff was all happening at the same time. But Mickey Hart was a great old friend of mine who was drummer for a group called Grateful Dead. He and I formed a team together and he was the one who found work because of his name and he was the one who brought *The Godfather* to us. Francis Ford Coppola lived in the Bay area, he still does, and so he gave us the film and then we put the

music together. In fact in the film, the last twelve minutes of the film where Marlon Brando gets killed is totally done by me. And so, when that happened I got an opportunity to do that, but the bug was already there; so it seems like it was a natural progression in my life. I did a Merchant Ivory film—*Heat and Dust*—and recently *The Little Buddha*, with Bernardo Bertolucci.

Karan Thapar: Why do you call it a bug when it is a flower that has blossomed on many occasions, because I gather you also did the Olympics music in 1996?

Zakir Hussain: No. In 1996 at Atlanta Olympics we got to do the opening ceremony of the film along with John Williams. John Williams's was the next piece and ours was the very opening piece, and it was called 'The Call of the Nation'. And it involved 400 drummers and 100 singers. That's all. Just drums and voices.

Karan Thapar: Okay, so while all this was coming to you your life also was changing in an emotional direction, you met the lady that you married, Antonia.

Zakir Hussain: Yes.

Karan Thapar: How did you meet her? What made you fall in love?

Zakir Hussain: Well, I was at the college in California, teaching music, and she came there to learn Indian dance, Kathak dance, classical dance. She is a lady who was American born, and of Italian origin and she was very much into India and into Indian stuff, so in the early seventies she came to California to learn classical Indian dancing, Kathak, and I ran into her and promptly invited her to a burger, and then we got together and sort of saw each other off and on for a few years, until we finally decided to live together.

Karan Thapar: Your parents weren't in your favour initially, I gather, but finally it was your father who helped you resolve the problem.

Zakir Hussain: Yes, he was of a more liberal nature, and having travelled all over the world, he was more open to the idea. And he loved, loves Tony. He says she is just fabulous. But we had to go through three different ceremonies.

Karan Thapar: One of which was a secret marriage because you married without them knowing.

Zakir Hussain: Without them knowing. It was a civil marriage at first, and then we had to do a Church wedding and then had a Muslim wedding.

Karan Thapar: So you are a much married man.

Zakir Hussain: Much married man, three times.

Karan Thapar: And always to the same wife.

Zakir Hussain: And always to the same wife; I don't know how that came about, that's the way it is and I am very happy.

Karan Thapar: Zakir, you have won a lot of recognition in your life. Well deserved recognition. You have won the Sangeet Natak Academi award, you have won the Padma Shri, you have won the world heritage award. But I gather you found out about the Padma Shri in a very unusual way.

Zakir Hussain: Oh. My God, yes. In fact the finding out about it was much more meaningful for me than actually going to receive the award. They announced the Padma Shri awards on the night of the 25th of January. So the newspapers would come out with it on the 26th morning. So the newspapers come out at three or four in the morning and there was this concert at Xavier's College

Quadrangle at Bombay. I was playing there with Ravi Shankar and my father was sitting in the front row in the audience, and the *Times of India* printing is like a block away or something, so at about 3.30 in the morning I am playing and suddenly this man comes running with a paper in his hand. He runs to my father in the front row which is a 'no no' when Pandit Ravi Shankarji is playing, and my father jumps up and he runs over to the announcer guy and I am wondering what's going on? Maybe somebody died, something happened, what's going on here. And then they waited till Raviji finished and then this announcer runs over to the stage and whispers in Raviji's ears. Raviji smiles, puts his sitar down and looks at me, looks at the audience and says, 'Ladies and gentlemen, Ustad Zakir Hussain,' that's the first time he called me an ustad, 'has just been awarded the Padma Shri.' Everybody erupted, and my father jumped onto the stage with a garland and he garlanded me and it was a very special, emotional moment.

Karan Thapar: What is amazing is that you have achieved so much and you are not even fifty as yet. Is that some sort of satisfaction or is there sometimes some sort of sadness like 'Oh God, I have got so far. Where do I go now?'

Zakir Hussain: It's a very very difficult thing. Sometimes I am worried, I am afraid, I fear where do I go next, what do I do, but the fact is I go and see my father who is eighty-one and he sits at his tabla and he becomes thirty-one. He becomes a young man. It's like rejuvenation.

Karan Thapar: So he's the icon you are going to follow?

Zakir Hussain: I am going to follow him, but at the same time I realize that he is still learning. And I realize that there is more. There're miles to go before I sleep. And his secret is to keep learning. Keep sorting things out, make it possible for people to understand things, simplify them, as I said there is a lot to do.

Karan Thapar: Zakir Hussain, there's miles to go before you sleep, unfortunately there's not miles to go before this interview ends. There's one thing I want to ask. I believe there is one thing that you are not learning, but you sing, and no one has heard Zakir sing; so sing for us.

Zakir Hussain: Sing for you. So what shall I sing for you? A song that I composed. Okay. '*Raat dhalne lagi, bujh gaye hai diye, rah takte hain hum jaane kiske liye.*' (It's late at night, the lamps are out, I lie in wait for I know not who.)

Karan Thapar: Let me take a line of yours and say, 'Wah Ustad.' Zakir, thank you very much.

Zakir Hussain: Great pleasure.

This interview was telecast on 5 April 2000.

Ustad Zakir Hussain was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2002 for his contribution to Indian classical music.

For several seasons, BBC's groundbreaking television interview programme *Face to Face India* kept viewers glued to their screens. As the anchor of the popular programme, Karan Thapar set new standards in television journalism. Many of his guests were reticent, reclusive people who were making a rare television appearance. But they felt so much at ease in the course of their conversations with Karan Thapar that they revealed intimate details about themselves that they had never before made public.

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For sale in the Indian Subcontinent only

ISBN 0-14-303344-1
9 780143 033448